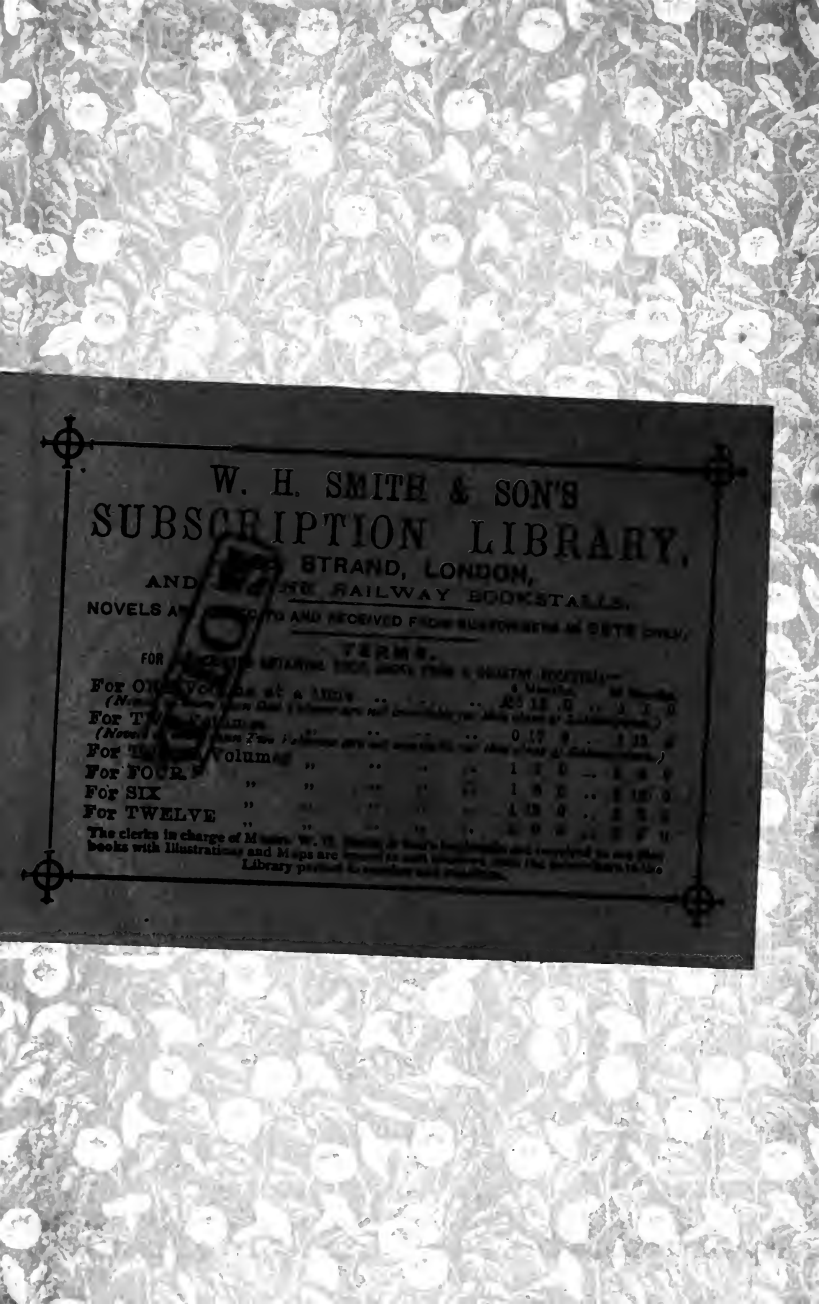
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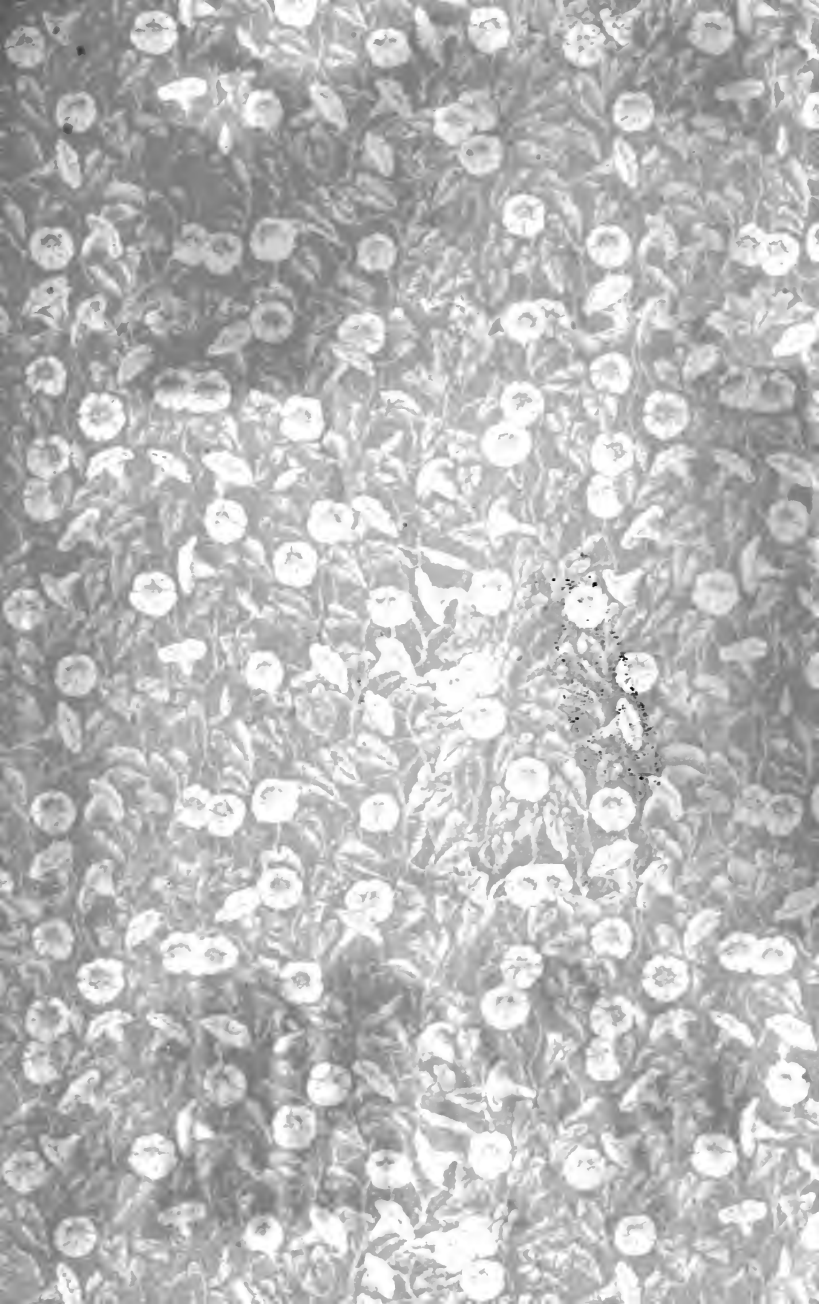

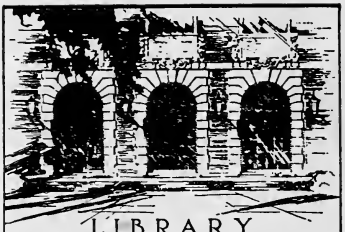

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RED DIAMONDS

VOL. II

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RED DIAMONDS

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY

AUTHOR OF 'DEAR LADY DISDAIN' 'DONNA QUIXOTE' 'CAMIOLA'
'THE COMET OF A SEASON' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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RED DIAMONDS

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRONG WEAPON

Bostock followed Granton to the foot of the daïs. Fidelia leaned over to speak to him.

'That was very well done, Mr. Bostock,' she said. 'I shall never again dare to encourage the hope I have cherished so long that some day or other I may be able to touch you.'

She pointed lightly towards the red heart on his breast as she spoke. If her finger had been a burning steel and his breast unde-

fended it could hardly have made him wince more unexpectedly. But Fidelia did not notice it, for she had turned to speak to Gerald, and Gerald did not notice it, for he was only looking at Fidelia; and Lady Scardale did not notice it, for she was intent upon her brother-in-law, and was earnestly hoping that he felt no great sense of discomfiture. Only Granton observed the odd look that came into Bostock's face.

'So that is your weak point, my man,' he said to himself. 'Well, well, I do not grudge you your glory in her eyes, but I think you will find it is dearly bought. There is a bad time waiting for you, I am afraid, my good Bostock, if I read you aright.'

Gerald had spoken to Fidelia, and Fidelia had turned round to him with a look of pleasure on her face. Granton, still un-

assumingly watching Bostock, saw the look, and saw that Bostock's thin lips seemed to grow thinner, a mere red line in his livid face.

Bostock suddenly turned to Gerald.

'How would you like to take a turn with the foils, Mr. Aspen?' There was an odd attempt to be light-hearted, almost conciliatory, about the man's voice, which sounded curiously in Granton's ears.

Gerald answered, smiling, and slightly embarrassed, that he was afraid he was not a good enough fencer to venture to cross swords with such a master as Mr. Bostock.

Bostock shook his head.

'You ought by your look to be a good fencer,' he said. 'I am seldom deceived, but I should like to make sure. Come, a couple of passes. I do not expect that you will defeat me,' he went on, while a very unpleasant expression that was intended

to represent a smile disturbed his face, 'but I shall be able, just for my own satisfaction, to decide what sort of a fencer you would make.'

'Yes, do, Mr. Aspen,' said Lady Scardale, who was rather anxious in her heart that someone else as well as Granton should suffer defeat at the hands of the fencing-master. Gerald glanced at Fidelia, who seemed to smile encouragement at him. That was enough for Gerald. Perhaps after all—who knows?—he might win. He was young, quick, in good condition; he had always considered himself a very fair fencer; he had kept his fencing up more than young journalists usually do. If he did succeed in touching Bostock, what a triumph! If he failed, there was no ignominy in failing after Granton, the more especially as he had not himself challenged the issue. So he went

hopefully enough into the dressing-room and came out very quickly arrayed for combat.

There is something exquisitely exhilarating about a fencing-match, which almost no other form of pastime can quite afford. For while it calls forth all the skill, all the dexterity, all the suppleness of body and steadiness of nerve of which a man is master, it goes to the root of the matter at once. It appeals to the instinct of battle, which every man carries at least a spice of, hidden away somewhere in his composition. Even boxing with all its charms does not so directly appeal to this higher sense of combativeness. For fencing is such a fascinating reproduction of real strife; it is the duel turned into a game, and played almost with real weapons; it affords something of the same pleasure that was accorded to the Scandinavian gods in Walhalla, who could fight all the afternoon

and be as much wounded and hacked as they pleased, but were sound and whole again when the time came for supper. Fencing is fighting at which a man may count on living to fight another day without the ignominy of running away. That is one reason amongst many why it is popular and endures in lands where men no more think of using the small sword to settle differences of opinion than they would think of taking the sedan-chair to go to the club.

The fencing began. Gerald was resolved to keep his head cool, and to adopt a policy of wary defence. He meant, as he put it picturesquely to himself, to sell his life as dearly as possible, and he entered upon the struggle as one who, foredoomed to defeat, resolved at least to make defeat dignified.

But to his surprise he found that he was doing better, very much better than he

expected. He held his own successfully against one or two of the master's attacks. Indeed it seemed to Gerald as if Bostock's feints were by no means as subtle or as invincible as they had seemed to be when he was dealing with Granton. 'Can it be,' Gerald asked himself with a beating heart, while he kept making attacks which were indeed repulsed, but not repulsed so strenuously as he expected, 'can it be that I am a better fencer than Granton? Can it be that there is a chance of my pinking the invincible Bostock?' As he thought this, Bostock made a feint which seemed to Gerald pretty obvious, and which he was able so promptly to forestall that when Bostock made the subsequent attack Gerald's parry was not only successful in defending his body from Bostock's point but actually struck the foil out of Bostock's hand and sent it spinning away to the far end of the room.

In an instant Gerald, half-proud, half-apologetic, had dropped his point, but Bostock, bounding a step or two back, caught up another foil from the rack behind him, and began to press Gerald hard.

Gerald was somewhat bewildered by his apparent triumph and by the extraordinary quickness with which Bostock had recovered from his disarmament. He seemed to be suddenly face to face with quite a new antagonist, before whom he felt quite convincingly that he was as helpless as a swimmer in some furious sea. He made the half-circle desperately as if for dear life, and was expecting momentarily the touch of the foil on his breast, when, to his surprise, he felt a thrill like that of a red-hot wire along the under part of his lifted left arm, and he was aware that Granton had flung himself between them, and had struck up Bostock's foil and had caught

Gerald's right wrist in his left hand. What had happened? What did it all mean? He heard Granton's voice speaking sternly.

'There is something the matter with your foil, Mr. Bostock.'

Gerald stood still and stared. Bostock, who when Granton had parted them, had seemed for a moment inclined to turn on his interrupter, was now standing erect and stiff. Granton, who was masked again, was looking straight at him.

'There is something the matter with your foil, Mr. Bostock.'

Bostock lifted up his foil, and Granton before he could prevent him promptly took it from him. Bostock made no show of any resistance. However better Bostock might be as a fencer, Granton was undoubtedly a far stronger man. Besides, Bostock did not seem to see any reason why he should resent Gran-

ton's interference. He only seemed to be stiffly surprised.

'Look here, Mr. Aspen,' said Granton; 'this is a pretty thing to fence with! Do you see this, Mr. Bostock?'

His voice was very sharp indeed. The two women, wondering at the unexpected episode, came down from the daïs. All they knew was that while they were watching the fencing Granton had suddenly slipped his mask on, caught up his foil, and at a bound had come between the combatants, and dexterously stopped them. Now they were anxious for the explanation.

Gerald looked at the foil and understood what Granton meant. It was a foil from which the button had been sharply broken off a very little distance from the point, leaving a jagged edge of steel. He stared in astonishment. Bostock stared also, his face dis-

playing the liveliest astonishment. Then he spoke:

'Good heavens, what a blunder! How *could* I have made such a mistake? Pray accept my profoundest apologies for my carelessness, Mr. Aspen. It was really your own fault, for you pressed me so hard that I got excited and caught up a disused foil by mistake. You are too quick a fencer for me.'

Bostock's face was perfectly still while he spoke, but the tones of his voice expressed the deepest regret. Gerald was touched by the regret and flattered by the compliment to his skill.

'Oh, it doesn't matter at all—not of the slightest consequence,' he murmured, but Granton caught him sharply up.

'Not of the slightest consequence—doesn't matter? You don't know what you are talking of! If that had been lunged home it

would have spitted you like a hare. Look at your sleeve, man!'

Granton's words recalled to Gerald the sharp sting of pain he had felt, a pain forgotten in the excitement of the subsequent seconds. He looked at his left sleeve. It and the shirt beneath it were torn, where the foil had passed through and been wrenched out when Granton struck it aside. Linen and cloth were wet with the blood that came from an ugly-looking scratch on the flesh.

'My poor boy!' said Lady Scardale.

'Lend me your handkerchief,' said Fidelia, 'I know something about bandaging.'

'Attended ambulance lectures, of course,' said Granton, with a laugh. 'Best leave it to me, Miss Locke; I have had practical experience and of worse wounds than this, though not worse than it would have been, by Jove! if I hadn't skipped in between with more luck

than Romeo's. Why a foil like that would go through a deal plank.

Bostock was profuse in his apologies. They ran from him rapidly, not ineloquently, persuasively—while his face remained unchanged the while, like the face of some old-fashioned fountain which never alters for all the volume of water between the unchanging lips. He could never forgive himself for his carelessness; he could not think how it came to pass that such a foil was lying about; he hoped Gerald would understand how deeply pained and grieved he was, and so on.

Gerald, whose arm was beginning to feel a little stiff and very sore, accepted these apologies in very good part and withdrew with Granton into the dressing-room, whence he emerged in a few minutes with a handkerchief tied deftly about his hurt by Granton, whose fingers proved to be, for such a matter,

as delicate and dexterous as any woman's could be.

'My dear boy,' he said to Gerald, who complimented him on his skill, 'I have helped to dress some devilishly ugly wounds in my time in many parts of the world.' He was silent for a second or two, and then he added, 'By Jove! I have been in a good many odd places and seen a good many rum sights, but I don't think I ever saw a much rummier thing than this, take it all in all.'

'Why, good gracious! you don't suppose he did it on purpose?' Gerald asked, in surprise; and Granton answered:

'Oh, of course not—but it was rummy all the same. A man who can lose his head like that is not quite the man whom I should choose for a fencing-master. That's all.'

Perhaps Gerald might have been inclined to agree more cordially with him if it had not

been for the fact that the trifling accident of which Bostock was the cause had really rendered him a service. For it had made Fidelia Locke exceedingly sympathetic and sweet and womanly tender in her solicitude for him; and she asked him how he did so often and so graciously that really Gerald felt more like a wounded hero returning from battle to the eyes of his lady love than a respectable young journalist who had had his arm scratched in an accident. It was a very sweet sensation to be pitied and fussed over and made much of by Fidelia Locke, and it is perhaps not surprising that Gerald could not find it in his heart to feel very angry with the blundering fencing-master.

As for the blundering fencing-master, he had disappeared as soon as possible. While Granton was dressing Gerald's scratch he had remained with Lady Scardale and Fidelia, and

had repeated to them all his profound expressions of regret and all his very plausible explanations of how the accident had occurred. He had never been disarmed before, not since he was a child; young Mr. Aspen had a wrist of iron; the foil flew so far away that his only thought was to be armed again, and his involuntary and not inexcusable breach of etiquette in seizing a fresh weapon from the rack instead of waiting and resuming the one which had been flung so far, had allowed him by a most unhappy accident to catch up a foil from which the button had been broken off by chance the previous day, and which should never have been left in the room at all.

The two young men walked a little way together after leaving Lady Scardale.

'You carried that off well,' Granton said, after a moment or two of silence.

'The hurt?—oh, it does not amount to anything.'

'No—I don't mean that—I mean the first meeting with Ratt Gundy turned into Rupert Granton. Well—I am much beholden to you for the quiet way in which you took it. As to the other business—it's a very queer affair, and I can't make it out.'

'I don't see anything very queer about it.'

'Don't you? Who is this fellow Bostock?'

'All I know of him is what you see—and the fact that he gave evidence at the inquest of poor Chickering.'

'Yes, but somehow his face haunts me; and not the face so much, perhaps, as the eyes. Where did I see those eyes before? I don't believe I ever saw the man until that inquest, but the eyes get on my nerves. I feel as if

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I had seen those very eyes but in a different face. I see it like a picture—I have a way of carrying my memories in pictures, don't you know—and I see Bostock's eyes in another man's face, only I can't recall the other face or think where I could have seen it. Well, anyhow, call me an idiot if it does not turn out that that man Bostock has some queer story behind him, and some still queerer story before him.'

Aspen could not see it, and only laughed, with a wonder in his secret heart why so dashing and generous a fellow as Granton should have such a prejudice against Bostock, merely because Bostock had got the better of him in a fencing bout.

CHAPTER XIV

A PLACE BY THE RIVER

A RIVER is an endless delight to minds that are in the least tinged with poetry. 'All my life long I loved rivers and poets who sang of rivers' are the memorable words of a great prose-writer who saw in his time many rivers. The word 'river' has its own invincible charm, calling up to a wanderer's mind visions of the yellow Nile as it flows 'through hushed old Egypt and her sands like some mysterious thought threading a dream'; of the mighty Mississippi whose channel varies day by day; of German Rhine, and Gallic Rhone and Holy Tiber; and the arid bed of Ilissus where Athenian washerwomen try to find water

enough to splash their clothes in, by the spot where Socrates talked with Charmides beneath the plane; of the Danube and the meagre Manzanares and many a stream beside; and, best of all to the English wanderer, his own dear Thames. That silver name calls up pictures of osiered reaches, of shining spaces of water fluttered by the passing oar, of green lawns reaching to the river's lip, of back-waters where the water-rat watches with amazement his reedy kingdom invaded by the darting canoe and gliding punt, of pleasant rural inns, dear to anglers, of gardens and locks crowded with a gaily coloured crowd and all manner of craft, of plashing weirs, of launches disturbing, like Leviathan, the sanctity of the river-god's repose.

But if such delicious glimpses of river life float across the fancy of him who thinks upon the 'Sweete Thames' of Spenser and of

Collins, there are other aspects of the river which he is less likely or less willing to remember. In its civic aspect the Thames is less enchanting. If the Roman severity of the Embankment lends it here and there something of an antique dignity its surroundings are principally grimy wharves, the many-windowed backs of warehouses, the landing-places of steamers, the mouths of canals, the mooring spaces of barges. Where the river widens towards Greenwich, welcoming the salt kisses of the sea, there is a kind of marine beauty, partly of actual fact, partly of dear association, which do much to redeem it, but there are places along our London stream which are as unlovely as can well be found in any portion of the earth. One of the ugliest spots in all the river is on the right bank beyond Battersea, just where the stream is thoroughly urban, just where it seems to have

abandoned all memories of the green fields it has passed, of the wooded hills whose bases it has washed. Here in a wilderness of decaying wharves and tumble-down houses stood a certain building which demands our special attention.

The building had apparently once been a kind of boat-house, but now it seemed to have been long disused. It stood out in the river some feet from the shore, on a platform supported on piles driven into the river bed. On one side some of the piles had settled down a little, so that the whole house sloped slightly from the perpendicular, rakishly, like a knowingly-adjusted, somewhat inebriated hat. The platform on which the house stood only extended about a foot all round the shanty, so that anyone who wanted to walk round the house would have to do so with dexterity, with outstretched arms flattened

against the wall, or run the risk of immersion in the stream. The hut had a door in front, and a door at the back, and a window on the up-stream side whose damaged panes consisted principally of brown paper. The building was connected with the shore by a sort of clumsy dilapidated bridge of planks rudely fastened together. By the down-stream corner of the river front an exceptionally dirty, disreputable-looking dingey was moored. The whole place in its squalor and neglect had a sinister, even a villainous appearance. Nobody quite knew whom it belonged to and nobody cared. It was rented, people understood, from a local landlord who grew rich on the rents of strange tenements, and it occasionally had an occupant—a red-haired, red-bearded man, who knew nobody, and whom nobody knew or seemed to want to know. The riverside

population were incurious. Their own affairs occupied them sufficiently. They had little leisure, little inclination, for the affairs of other people.

The occupant was at home one morning. The door facing the river was open and let a certain amount of pale light into the sordid interior, which in its decay carried out worthily the traditions of the exterior. The occupant sat by the side of the door, with his back to the wall, in such a way as to obtain all the advantage of the light—for he was reading—without being seen from the outside. He was red-haired and red-bearded ; between the red hair and the red beard and the raw fringe of red whisker there was not much of the occupant's face to be seen. But his eyes were bright curious eyes, and they did not somehow seem to be in keeping with the red hair.

The occupant seemed to be quite absorbed in his study. He was reading a letter which bore signs of having been much read before, and yet the familiarity of its contents did not appear to rob it of any of its interest in the eyes of the man who was reading it. As soon as he came to the end of it he turned back again to the beginning and read it slowly over again, his eye travelling steadily along the lines and never missing a single word. Presently he shook himself, folded the letter up, and was about to put it in his pocket, then he paused, as if changing his mind, opened the letter again, spread it carefully out and began to read it out once more, but this time aloud, in a low measured monotonous voice. He read it as if in the process of thus reading it aloud he was fulfilling some religious function, going through some daily duty, as indeed he was.

'In the foreign lands where I have been,' he often said to himself, sitting in that same place, 'priests read their breviaries, aloud to themselves, daily. This is my breviary, and I read it aloud to myself daily, though I know every word of it by heart.'

The letter was not a very long one. 'Son Japhet,' it began, and as the man read those words his strange eyes looked stranger.

'Son Japhet—By the time you get this I shall be a good bit dead. They are going to hang me, —— them; they've got the bulge on me, for I meant to do for them—and I did for some of them, too, be praised. You know I always wanted to be a fine gentleman some day; and I wanted you to be a fine gentleman, too, Japhet, and so you shall be, though I don't live to see it. I told you about our little diamond ring here. There is to

be the big divide next New Year, but I shan't be in it. I shall be otherwise engaged, —— them. Now the fewer there are to divide the more there will be for the survivors. Some of them have gone to kingdom come already—never mind how. I didn't think I should be joining them so soon, but it was my own fault for letting them get the chance to have the drop on me.

'However, it's no use crying over spilt milk, or spilt blood either, for the matter of that. My little game is just over, Japhet, and your little game is going to begin. They are scoring off me now, Japhet; you've got to score off them by-and-by. Remember, the divide's on New Year's Day. Every man that drops out of the running before then makes it a bigger pool to share. If they all drop out except you, why, you are a rich man, Japhet; one of the richest men in the

world. Think of that! And think of this, too—that they are going to hang me in half an hour, and if you are as good a pal to me as I have been to you, you'll make some of them pay for it. Seth Chickering's going to London soon; he's been the worst of the gang against me all along. London's a mighty dangerous playground, Japhet, and it might be that Seth came to harm. Suppose you looked after him a bit and kept him out of mischief, eh? As for the others, I don't know where the devil Ratt Gundy has gone to. He is a devil himself, he is; but he did me a —— good turn without knowing it when he shot Locke's silly heart out.

'Well, Japhet, I guess that's about all I've got to say. A nod is as good as a wink to such a dark horse as you are. You've got to play for a big game, and if you win, why you can boss the world, that's about

the size of it. —— them all; if I only had my old gun in my hand how I would make them sing small, though they crow so loud now over the hanging of me! Remember that, Japhet, they hanged your father—your father who was good to you and played a great game for you. You'll be serving your own turn as well as mine in thinning them out, so thin them out and be damned to them, and to you and to me too—which is what the parson says will happen. Your affectionate father, Noah Bland.'

When the man had finished reading the letter aloud he gave a kind of groan, more like the growl of a wounded animal than any articulate human utterance. Then he folded the letter carefully, placed it back in its stained envelope, with the Cape Colony stamps and Cape Town postmark, and put it back in his breast pocket. When he had done so he

sat still for some seconds staring at the wall opposite, as if his whole attention was riveted to the fantastic movement of the sunlight as it danced, reflected from the water outside. But the man was not watching the sunlight —was not thinking of the sunlight. He was thinking of that queer South African tragedy—of the strange succession of deaths, of the lynching of Noah Bland, of the curiously transmitted heritage of hate, and lust of blood and lust of gold. He was thinking of his own strange life and of its longings, of its desperate shifts and sins: of the endless pursuit of money, the quenchless thirst for power. Before his swimming eyes the walls seemed alternately to show red with the stains of blood and to glow yellow with the glitter of gold. Faces rose up from the past; the face of Noah Bland—fierce, forbidding, powerful—a face at once ambitious and bestial, the

face of a Napoleon of gorillas. There were other faces—faces of men who had been Noah Bland's accomplices in his many dark leagues of crime, faces of men who had been his victims, hideous faces, hopeless faces; they all came crowding out upon his memory now, as some great crowd rushes through an opened door. Some of those faces he had not thought of for years; some he had almost forgotten; some—but these were fewer—he had wished to forget. As he sat there watching these faces of his fancy they seemed to vanish, giving place to a single face, a strong, foolish, kindly face, framed in ruddy hair; a face that had been ruddy once, but now was pale in recent death. As that face floated into his mind, the man smiled in cruel satisfaction; but even as he did so the smile died away, for that face had gone and given way to another —a woman's face, young and exquisitely fair,

—and as he thought of that face he sprang to his feet with another animal-like cry, and flung up his arms, and opened and clenched his hands as if he were grasping at something that was almost beyond his reach, and trying to drag it down to him.

'I will win that, too,' he muttered to himself, 'that and all.' He shook himself as a man might do who was trying to shake off sleep, and turning, walked to the open doorway and stood staring at the stream.

In the bright light he did not look attractive. Anyone passing just then and seeing him, anyone with an eye to the fitness of things would have thought that the unpleasant neighbourhood had found a very appropriate inmate in this unpleasant figure. But no one was passing. The river was almost deserted, save for some rare barges lazily moving along.

The man walked cautiously along the

narrow platform till he came to the corner where the dingey was moored. He got into the boat, unfastened the rope that tied it, lifted the sculls into the water, and pushed off. Keeping the boat's head round, he began to row up stream, at first slowly, but after a few seconds with such rapidity of stroke and such great muscular power that the dingey seemed almost to fly through the water. The current was strong against him, the wind was strong against him, but he seemed to make light alike of wind and current as he rowed steadily on, tearing his boat through the water, and putting into every stroke an amount of skill and strength which would have delighted a University coxswain.

When he had gone a certain distance he suddenly slackened speed, and turning his boat round with a few strong strokes, he began to row as swiftly down stream. He rowed

for some time without stopping, his strokes falling with exquisite regularity into the water. At a uniform speed he passed along the unsightly old wharves till he came to Battersea Bridge and the beginning of the Embankment. After he shot the bridge his strokes came as steadily as before, but somewhat slower, and he dropped leisurely down the river till he came to that part of the Embankment on to which the old Physic Garden fronts.

Here he suddenly shipped his oars, and allowed the boat to rock upon the waters, drifting slowly with the current, while his eyes were fixed upon the red wall of a house to the right of the Physic Garden—a red wall which he could just distinguish gleaming in the sunlight through its screen of guardian trees.

As he gazed his lips moved and he mut-

tered to himself. 'To win or lose,' he said. 'To win or lose. To win that is worth all the rest. But to win that and to win the rest—to win all—that is the great game, that is the game to play, that is the game to win.'

He was silent for a few seconds while his boat drifted idly upon the idle waters. Then, when he had fairly dropped below the Physic Garden and out of sight of the red walls on which his thoughts were fixed, he caught up the oars again, turned his boat's head round, and rowed without a pause as fast as he could back to the crazy building which he had chosen for an abode.

He tied up his boat and entered the place. As he trod, the crazy old timbers seemed to tremble, and when he flung himself into a chair the edifice shook. He sat in moody silence for a while; then he rose, and going

to a little cupboard in a corner he took out a small bottle containing a dark, ruby-coloured liquid. He held the bottle up to the light and looked at it with a grim smile. 'Not quite the kind of stuff to make the hand steady and the mind cool,' he muttered to himself. 'But I want it to-day, I want it to-day.'

He poured a quantity of the fluid into a glass, and held the glass in his hand meditatively, while he still muttered to himself:

'Here are power and love and riches, everything for which one longs and hopes and fights, full triumph, full revenge—all in the magic of those dark drops.' He shrugged his shoulders and laughed bitterly. 'It is as good as the real thing while it lasts,' he said, and he spoke as if he were sneering at himself. 'Here goes; here's luck!' and he drank the fluid down. Then he flung himself upon the

ground again, with his back to the wall, and sat there silent, motionless, staring at the door, and watching with glazed eyes the visions begotten of the drug.

CHAPTER XV

HERB OF GRACE

Most people in Chelsea knew Mrs. Borringer's shop in the Queen's Road. Many a stranger was purposely brought to see the shop. Mrs. Borringer was a remarkable woman. She was calmly conscious of the fact and calmly satisfied with the fact. Some of her friends said that she had a face like a horse. She knew that they said so, and she knew also that there was a certain felicity of description in what they said; but she did not mind in the least. 'What has that got to do with my own ability in my own particular line?' she would ask; and the argument was really unanswerable. What had Mrs. Borringer's

greater or less degree of facial resemblance to a horse to do with her ability in her particular line?

Mrs. Borringer's particular line was herbs. She was a herbalist; she believed, fanatically, in the amelioration of mankind through the properties, juices, and essences of herbs, and to further that amelioration she kept a herbalist's shop in the Queen's Road, Chelsea, almost exactly opposite to the gate of Chelsea Hospital. There was no special reason why Mrs. Borringer should keep a shop of any kind, whether a herbalist's or another, but she kept it on principle, very much as Lady Scardale kept the Culture College.

'Lady Scardale looks after people's minds,' Mrs. Borringer said, 'I look after their bodies; that's the chief difference between us.'

Naturally, Lady Scardale and Mrs. Borringer were excellent friends. It would

have made no whit of difference to Lady Scardale whether Mrs. Borringer had or had not been a regular shopkeeper come from the class of people to whom the keeping of small shops is the express business of life. Lady Scardale was honestly democratic in her heart as well as in her theories, and would have welcomed the society of a chimney-sweep if that chimney sweep had anything interesting to say for himself, or any suggestion to make about the improvement of the chimneys in the houses of the poor. But Mrs. Borringer did not belong to the class of people to whom the keeping of shops seems to be the pre-ordained business of life. She believed in the healing grace of herbs, and it seemed to her after due reflection that the best way of disseminating that belief was by taking a small shop and encouraging, through her personal practice and example, the sale of herbs

There are many occupations far more disagreeable than the sale of herbs. The sale of herbs is a clean business, it is dry, it is somewhat sweet-smelling, it brings its practitioner, in a pleasant way, in touch with the mysterious forces of Nature and the regenerating strength of the mother earth. One learns an infinite variety of pleasing secrets in the study of herbs; one stores the chambers of the mind with a variety of quaint and delightful names of plants—the names that figure in the Shepherd's Calendar and that are so many thousand times more delightful than the rigid Latin names of the scholar.

Here were to be found specimens of almost every herb under the hoop of heaven, dried in bundles, powdered in packages, inspissated in syrups. Here were the dried roots of the marsh-mallow, whose pale purple

petals tell of August and the Autumn in regions of salt marshes. Here was the shrubby stalk of the garden sage, in whose medicinal qualities Mrs. Borringer believed as firmly as the Chinese believe. Here were masses of the acrid rues that Mithridates believed, and learned doctors since the king of Pontus believe, to possess the power of resisting the action of poisons, and believe inaccurately.

Here were specimens of such quaintly-named plants as Solomon's seal and Virgin's bower and *Palma Christi*; here was masterwort, fragrant to smell, pungent to taste—masterwort, which in earlier and simpler days was known as 'the divine remedy,' so excellent was it esteemed. Here was holy thistle, which of old its admirers called 'Benedictus' for its supposed astonishing virtues.

Here in Mrs. Borringer's shop the leaves of the noble laurel aroused no thoughts of Apollo, but were regarded solely as the materials for the manufacture of laurel tea. Here were the flowers of lady's-smock, which is also called the cuckoo flower, and the leaves of the ground-ivy, excellent for infusion, and the dried seeds of pimento, and the dried leaves of hemlock hidden away from the light, and the dried roots of the Christmas rose or black hellebore, and the dried leaves of the deadly foxglove, and its less deadly cousin, the hedge hyssop.

To the student Mrs. Borringer's shop presented a kind of condensation of the world. He might drift back from shelf to shelf to the very dawn of science.

Her little shop in the Queen's Road was a very miracle of old-fashioned neatness. It was not in the least like a modern shop. It

might have belonged to some country town in the middle of the last century—it might almost have nestled in the arcades of some mediæval Italian city—except, perhaps, that its pervading and almost delicate neatness gave its old-fashioned air an especially English complexion. Mrs. Borringer's shop was not in the least like the shop of the apothecary whom young Romeo visited on a memorable and melancholy occasion. It was exquisitely clean, ineffably orderly. Outside, it was painted in a lightish shade of green, suggestive of early spring, chosen, perhaps, partly as pointing a moral between the dry, mummied condition of the plants that were arranged behind the panes and along the internal shelves, partly as if in some measure to console those very plants by reminding them of the woodlands and the meadows, the heaths and uplands, from which they had been called

away, to aid, through the subtle chemistry of Nature, in the healing of afflicted mankind.

Within the window were arranged—even arrayed, for the business was managed with an eye to the picturesque—any quantity of dried plants, bundles of mysterious twigs, shrivelled bulbs, and withered grasses, all presenting to the gaze of the inexperienced a medley of worthless weeds, but to Mrs. Borringer, and those who shared in the wonders of her art, they were full of deep meaning and of indefinite consolation.

Inside, the little shop was all shelves and cupboards and diminutive drawers. There was a neat little counter which was always covered with packages of seeds and specimens of preserved herbs, strong-smelling spices, and sweet-smelling lavender, masses of thyme, and rue, and rosemary. It was the most curious shop to enter, for the atmosphere was very

strange, faintly sweet, subtle, and almost heady. It was like entering some tomb—some Eastern tomb, where the mummied body of a Pharaoh lay, steeped in the strongest spices, to await the summons of Osiris ; yet there was something balsamic in it too, something that was almost as tonic and invigorating as the slight wind that stirs faintly among the pine trees in a land of coniferous hills. There were elements of perfume in that blended air which came from plants grown in no English garden, from simples gathered on no English hill.

The learned botanist could have guessed by his sense of smell what a frequent inspection of the contents of certain of the shelves and drawers would have confirmed, that many of the dried plants that lay there colourless had first waxed to perfection in the luxurious darkness of tropic jungles, or beneath the heat of tropic suns.

The tropic element in this English herbarium was not difficult of explanation to anyone who knew anything about it and Mrs. Borringer. It was due to Mr. Borringer. Not to the Mr. Borringer who had given Mrs. Borringer his name so many years ago, down in that quiet Surrey village where he and she first breathed the air. Not that Mr. Borringer, now dead and buried this many a year, and sleeping his last sleep in the quiet Chelsea churchyard, but his brother, Mr. Borringer the sailor—Skipper Borringer, as he was still called by old-fashioned friends in the vicinity of Godalming and Guildford, a persistent skimmer of the seas.

There was an element of romance about Mrs. Borringer's career; there was an element of romance about the career of Skipper Borringer. This latter fact is not surprising; to be a sailor is to be, *ex officio*

as it were, romantic—to be free of a wider world than that of common folks who stop at home, and sleep sluggabed upon the stable earth. But Mrs. Borringer, who sold herbs in a shop in Queen's Road—there did not seem at first to be anything very romantic about her.

But she had had her romance, and a not incurious one. A generation earlier she was Susan Gamell, the very fresh, very plump, very pretty, twenty-year-old daughter of a well-to-do farmer, who was almost, but not quite, a gentleman farmer in that rich and pleasant land of Surrey which lies below the Hog's Back. His farm lay but a mile or two from Godalming, hard by the Winding Way. Perhaps farming was a better thing then than it is now; certainly it proved profitable in Farmer Gamell's hands, and he had plenty of money in the bank and plenty of

money to spend upon his daughter and only child.

Mr. Gamell was a widower, and he adored Susan as only a lovable man can love an only child. Nothing was too good for her, and so it happened that Susan got a very much better education than was the lot of even well-to-do farmers' daughters thirty years ago. But if Farmer Gamell was fortunate, there were fellow farmers who were not so fortunate, and Farmer Borringer was one of these. The Borringer farm paid its way and fed and clothed its owners—but that was all it did; and the Borringer family was unlike the Gamell family, for Farmer Borringer's wife was alive and thriving, and Farmer Borringer had two sons.

Those two sons were both young men, one was nineteen and the other twenty; and they both did as they were destined to do, and as

it was indeed their duty to do—they both fell in love with Susan Gamell. Susan Gamell did her duty in falling in love with one of them. They were different, the two brothers. Andrew, the elder, was quiet, steady, solid, a slow learner and slow thinker; but what he thought he thought well, and what he learned he learned well. Hiram, the younger, was very different; he was a lively country lad, even a bit wild; very good looking, a great hand at all rural sports, a great hero at all rural festivities.

It would be only natural for a girl to fall in love with the idle apprentice instead of the industrious, but Susan was independent even as a young girl, and she fell in love with Andrew Borringer, to his calm satisfaction and to the very bitter and very real despair of Hiram.

It was late one summer evening that

Hiram, leaning over a stile that led into the Gamell acres, told Susan of his love, and learned to his surprise and sorrow that she was already plighted to his brother Andrew.

'Is there no hope for me?' he asked wildly.

'None,' she answered.

Then he bade her good-bye, very gravely and sadly.

'I shan't see you again,' he said; 'at least, not for a while. This bit of earth don't suit me after this, and I'll try something else.'

He pressed her hand warmly, ran along the path through the fields they had just traversed, and disappeared behind a hedge of alders. She did not see him again for fifteen years.

Hiram had a little money, a few pounds of his own, and he and his few pounds disappeared together. He left a note behind to

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his brother, saying that he was tired of England and intended to try foreign parts. Andrew sighed over his roving disposition, shook his head when he talked of it to Susan, and wondered what his reason could be. Susan professed wonder also, but seemed unable to enlighten him.

Then Andrew, having proposed for Susan's hand and being accepted, repeated his proposal formally to Farmer Gamell, and was as formally but most decisively rejected. Old Gamell was as obstinate as a mule when he liked, and in this matter of the marriage he seemed inflexible. Susan took his refusal, as she took everything in life, with composure.

Luckily, composure was also the principal element in her lover's composition. 'We must wait,' Susan said, and Andrew agreed, and they did wait. Other suitors came in and offered themselves to Susan, suitors upon

whom old Gamell looked with a favouring eye, but one and all Susan politely showed to the farm door. If her father was obstinate, so was she. She would not marry Andrew without her father's consent, though she was five-and-twenty; but she would marry nobody else.

So things drifted on through five summers and winters. She and Andrew met occasionally, but not very often. Each was perfectly devoted to the other; both did their appointed work with a patience that had about it an antique dignity; they knew how to wait, and to wait without wailing.

After five years, Farmer Gamell took to his bed, and being sick, felt sorrow for his stubbornness, and gave his long-delayed consent. Both Susan and her lover accepted their good fortune with a decent joy, but before they could be married Farmer Gamell

died and was buried, and Susan was rigid—as, indeed, Andrew would have expected and desired her to be—about the due observance of the proper period of mourning.

For a year each remained almost as distant as before; he the head of his little farm, she the head of her great farm. But the year came to an end, and ended the patient waiting of these exemplary lovers.

They were married in Godalming Church, and the head of the house of Raven gave away the bride, and Andrew came across from his little farm to settle down as the master of the big farm. He was the master in name and the master in deed, but he never took a step without consulting his wife, and he never disregarded her advice but once—when he rode to hounds on a horse which she misdoubted, and the horse fell at a fence and threw him.

He never recovered from the effects of the fall, and he died and left Susan a widow with one little girl, Lydia, ten years after they were married in Godalming Church. His widow mourned for him deeply, but she kept her sorrow stoutly to herself, devoted herself to her little girl, and carried on her farm so well that no one who worked upon it missed the hand of Andrew Borringer.

Fifteen months after Andrew's death a man came to the garden gate and looked in. He was burnt a brown red ; his crisp black hair and beard had streaks of grey in them ; his eyes were very bright, and the backs of his big brown hands had tattoo marks on them. Mrs. Borringer, seated in the window arranging herbs, nodded pleasantly to him. 'Good evening, Hiram,' she said, just as she had said it any time before that evening

when he disappeared behind the alders. And Hiram came in and explained himself.

He had been to sea; he had been in all parts of the world; he had turned his hand to anything that was honest and hard to do, and everything had gone well with him. He had found gold in Australia, and silver in Bella Nevada, and rubies in Burmah, and diamonds at the Cape. He had always loved the sea ever since the days when as a lad he used to tramp along the Portsmouth Road, mile after mile, without conscious fatigue, for the pleasure of seeing the great ships and the great grey water.

When he ran away from England and his grief he was too old to enter either the Royal Navy or the merchant service. But he worked his way to South America, and happened to do well there, and bit by bit he earned enough and learned enough to buy a

vessel of his own and go where he pleased with her. He was now only forty years old, but he was in his way a rich man, with interest of all kinds in all parts of the world. But though he was rich enough to live in Park Lane if he pleased, though he had accounts in half-a-dozen banks, any one of which represented in itself a comfortable little fortune, he always looked like what he was, and what he wanted to be—the master of a ship. 'I am a trader,' he would say, and he was proud of it.

As a matter of fact, he was something more than a trader—he was an explorer, and had distinguished himself in an Arctic expedition, which he carried out at his own expense, and which had earned him an honourable reputation in the world of wanderers and an election to the membership of the Voyagers' Club. He had been in China,

travelling in the interior, when he heard of his brother's death. At that time the news was half a year old. As soon as he could he started to return home; but it is not so easy to leave the interior of China at a moment's notice as it is to return, say, from Paris to London. His expedition had trouble with robbers, trouble with fever, trouble with false guides. It took him some time to get out of China, and then more time to get home, so that Mrs. Borringer was fifteen months a widow when Hiram arrived at the gate.

Hiram's purpose was simple enough. He told Mrs. Borringer that he loved her still—that if she thought it right he would gladly marry her; such a marriage, he explained, was customary enough in many countries. But Mrs. Borringer did not like it. 'It may be customary elsewhere,' she said, 'but it isn't here, and if it were I wouldn't,' which slightly

incoherent statement Skipper Borringer wisely took to be final.

Then he inquired, delicately enough, if she needed anything, and ascertained to his half-regretful satisfaction that she was well provided for, and that there was nothing he could do for her. But he gave her many rare and precious gifts from the stores of his explorations; declared that Lydia was just what her mother was at her age—Lydia was then ten—and finally, after a residence of a couple of months at Godalming, announced that he was due in New Guinea on an ethnological expedition. So he said good-bye and departed.

Skipper Borringer went his wild way, going down to the seas in his ship and sailing those seas to all manner of distant and wonderful ports; Mrs. Borringer went her way, coming to London. She was determined that her

daughter Lydia should have the best education that could be got for her, and Lady Scardale's Culture College seemed to afford the desired opportunity. Lady Scardale, stopping at Holmraven once, had heard of Mrs. Borringer and had sought her out, as she always sought out people of originality, people with strength of character.

She had liked Mrs. Borringer and Mrs. Borringer liked her; and she had talked of her college scheme to Mrs. Borringer, and Mrs. Borringer had applauded the idea. So when the Culture College was fairly started, Mrs. Borringer resolved that it should include Lydia among its disciples. She put the farm into careful hands, and secure in the payment of a large and regular rent, she invaded London. But Mrs. Borringer was not a woman to be idle even in London—hence the shop. She had always, from her youngest days, been

deeply interested in the study of herbs and simples and their properties, and she resolved now that she would apply that knowledge to some purpose. The little shop in the Queen's Road was to let; Mrs. Borringer took it as it stood, lived with her daughter in the upper part, and converted the lower part into a herbarium. Lisbeth, an elderly woman from the farm who shared her mistress's tastes and much of her knowledge, looked after the shop under Mrs. Borringer's supervision, while Lydia attended the Culture College. All were supremely happy.

CHAPTER XVI

NEW MYSTERIES

THE days went on and on, and Gerald was a frequent visitor at the College of Culture, and Rupert Granton was still more often there. Gerald was beginning to discover for himself what many a man had discovered before him, that the possession of wealth is by no means a guarantee of tranquillity. Gerald Aspen was undoubtedly rich—at least, he was to be rich in a few months—but undoubtedly he was not tranquil. On the contrary, he felt himself growing more uneasy, more restless, more irritable daily.

The fault, however, of the changed condition did not lie directly with the expected

fortune. Only indirectly had his inheritance caused him any change of spirit. It was because that inheritance had for the first time made him aware of the existence on the habitable globe of a young woman named Fidelia that Aspen was occasionally tempted to gird at his affluence in the spirit of a new Timon. For, to tell the truth, Aspen was beginning to find that his thoughts dwelt daily more and more upon the image of Fidelia Locke. Hers was a very delightful image to dwell upon, and, so far at least, Aspen had no just cause for complaint or telf-tormenting.

But the more Gerald thought of Fidelia the more also he convinced himself that he was acting very foolishly in allowing himself to think so incessantly of her, and the more he convinced himself of his folly the more also did he persist in his folly. He frankly admitted to himself that the more he saw of

Fidelia the more he longed to see her, that the more he thought of her the sweeter his thoughts seemed, and the more delightful her image. 'There's no mistake about it,' he said to himself one day, as he walked slowly along the road leading to Lady Scardale's—a road with which his feet had grown strangely familiar—'there's no mistake about it, I am in love with Fidelia Locke; and there's no mistake about it, either, I might just as well be in love with the moon for all the good it is likely to do me.'

Gerald Aspen was mistaken in his deduction. It always does a man good to be in love with a good girl, and whether she returns his affection or not is really by the way. But he was accurate enough in his estimate of his own emotions. He had naturally seen a good deal of Fidelia of late, and the more he saw of her the more completely he surrendered

himself to the charm of her beauty and her strong spirit. 'Yes,' Gerald went on to himself, 'Granton is right. There never was a girl like Fidelia,' and as the name of Lady Scardale's brother-in-law flitted across his mind his face darkened, for he had touched the key-note of his disquietude.

It was not so much his own unanswered devotion to Fidelia Locke which had of late so troubled him; it was the openly displayed devotion of Rupert Granton for Fidelia which put him into such perturbation. Rupert Granton's admiration for Fidelia was unconcealed, and what was more to the purpose in Gerald's vexation—it seemed to impress Fidelia very pleasurably.

It was impossible for Gerald to conceal from himself that Ratt Gundy—or rather Rupert Granton—had won his way into Fidelia's favour very remarkably. He had done his

best to keep the two apart, he had roundly refused to have anything to do with advancing the acquaintanceship, and now, in spite of all his wishes, here were Rupert Granton and Fidelia Locke apparently the best of friends, always seemingly delighted to meet each other, always full of mutual confidences.

Poor Gerald! It must be recorded to his credit that, although it was in his power at any moment to destroy the friendship by telling Fidelia who Lady Scardale's brother-in-law was, by simply saying, 'Rupert Granton is Ratt Gundy, and Ratt Gundy is the man who, on his own confession to me, killed your father'—though it was in his power at any moment to do this, and in an instant to destroy the pretensions of a man whom he believed to be a dangerous rival, the thought of such a betrayal of Ratt Gundy's confidence never seriously entered into his mind. It galled him to think that Rupert Granton seemed to be

on a more intimate footing with Fidelia than he was; it roused a sense of wild impotent anger in his mind when he saw her talking, earnest, interested, absorbed, with the man whose hand had killed her father, with the man whom by his own plighted word he was to help her to discover and to punish. But there was nothing to be done.

Gerald could not betray Ratt Gundy, and without betraying Ratt Gundy there was no way for him to counteract the influence of Rupert Granton over Fidelia Locke.

Lady Scardale had set her heart on one thing, and that was, a marriage between Fidelia and Rupert Granton. She loved the girl dearly, she appreciated her purity and her many sweet and noble qualities; she knew, or at least she guessed, what a wild kind of life Rupert had led, and yet she dearly wished that Fidelia should marry him.

Lady Scardale was one of those women—very good and clever women often—who think a pure girl cannot have any better business in life than that of taking in hand some battered-out rake and reforming him. It did not occur to her that there was anything shocking or unnatural in this union of uncongenial natures, nor had her own sad experience satisfied her that a woman may sacrifice her purity and her life for the sake of redeeming a man, and have to leave him unredeemed in the end. She told herself that Rupert was a very different man from his brother, and she was right in that; but she did not think seriously enough of Fidelia's share in the experiment.

Sometimes, indeed, it had occurred to her that perhaps Fidelia might get to care too much about Gerald Aspen; but even a conviction of that kind would not have stopped

her match-making plans. She did not care much about mere love affairs; she did not believe girls usually took them very seriously, and she was of opinion that women have higher duties in this world than loving and being made love to. It would, she thought, be a thousand times a nobler piece of work for the girl—for the best of girls—to redeem and regenerate a man like Rupert Granton than to make happy a man like Gerald Aspen. Any other girl, she thought, who was nice, would do for Gerald Aspen just as well as Fidelia; but she did not know any girl except Fidelia who could have any real and abiding influence over Rupert Granton.

Therefore she began to grow a little jealous about Gerald Aspen's frequent visits, and was much delighted in her heart at the evident pleasure which Fidelia found in the society of Rupert Granton. She thought she

could read into Fidelia's breast—and, in truth, she could not.

Fidelia did enjoy the society of Rupert Granton very much. Her life had been for the most part cabined and confined, and he came to her with the atmosphere of a brilliant, broad, and many-tinted world about him. She liked his daring, his scorn of conventionalities, his frankness, his exhilarating animal spirits, and his sunny temper. She liked to hear him sing, she liked to hear him talk, to talk to him. She could be infinitely more frank and free with him than with Gerald.

There was not much difference between the ages of the two young men, but Rupert appeared to her to be infinitely older—to belong to a different generation—to be about the same sort of age as her father. As her father—yes, there was the reason deep down

in her heart which made her cling to Granton. It had grown to be a conviction in her mind, deep grounded as an article of faith, that through Rupert Granton she would learn something about her father's death.

She had no actual reason for thinking this—she had no reason to believe that Rupert had been in the diamond mines or had ever seen her father, but the moment she saw him, and heard of his strange wandering life, it seemed to be borne in upon her that in him she had found the man who would help her to some trace of her father's murderer. For the girl had made up her mind that her father was murderously done to death.

Lady Scardale knew Fidelia well—thought she knew her to the heart's core—but she knew nothing of all this. She was as much mistaken as Gerald Aspen. She did not know the new Fidelia who had suddenly taken

the place of the other Fidelia. She did not know the new soul that had sprung up in the girl's breast, the new passion, stronger than love or jealousy or ambition—the passion for revenge on the murderer of her father.

And so Lady Scardale went on smiling to herself as she saw with what gladness the eyes of Fidelia were turned to the coming of Rupert, and with what eager interest she listened to his words, and she said to herself that all that meant growing love, which to Lady Scardale's thinking was something far better than the terrible love at first sight—the fire of peat or straw, as she thought it, that blazes up in all its strength at once, and just as suddenly goes out and leaves behind it nothing but a heap of ashes. Lady Scardale longed for the time when Fidelia would come to her and take her into her confidence, and tell her all.

Now it so happened that this very day, while Gerald was walking slowly to Lady Scardale's and trying to find some decent excuse for calling again so soon, Fidelia was having a momentous talk with Granton. Granton needed no excuse for going any day or every day to see his sister-in-law; and his sister-in-law gave him every opportunity of being alone with Fidelia. So this day Fidelia sprang upon him a long-meditated plot. She began asking him all about his travels and adventures, and at last she asked him if he had ever been to any of the diamond mines in South Africa. Taken off his guard, and not knowing what was to come, he owned up to having been there.

'You know my extraordinary story,' she said, 'and you would be interested in it for Lady Scardale's sake.'

'For your sake, Miss Locke.'

'Thank you. Well, there are some things about it which I have not been able to understand. Everybody concerned in what happened out there seems to be dead—or lost. Mr. Aspen's father is dead—my father is dead—Captain Raven's brother is dead—the man who brought the whole horrible story to England was killed the first night he reached London—and one other man who was out there and knew all about it has disappeared; he has disappeared off the face of the earth, nobody knows where he has gone to. Why did he go away in that strange and sudden way? Was it to escape from justice? Was it he who killed the man in St. James's Street? Some people said it was he. What do you think?' She spoke fast and eagerly.

'Well, I was not here at the time, you know.' He spoke hesitatingly.

'Yes, but you must have read all about

it. Was it he who committed the murder? What do you think?'

'Ratt Gundy murder poor Seth Chickering! My dear Miss Locke, the idea—forgive me for saying it—is too absurd. Ratt Gundy murder Seth Chickering! Why, they were the best of friends.'

Granton's feelings had thrown him a little off his guard, and he read the fact in Fidelia's surprised and flashing eyes.

'Oh!—then you knew this man—this Ratt Gundy?'

Her eyes sparkled with the excitement of the question.

Granton was staggered by her eagerness. He soon, however, pulled himself together.

'Yes; I did know Ratt Gundy—I have known such a lot of people in my time that one can't recollect them all or all about them, but I believe I did know Ratt Gundy.'

'But you must have known him better than that—you must remember him—he is not a man to be forgotten in that light sort of way.'

'Why, did you know him?'

'No, I never saw him; but I have longed to see him, and I have prayed Mr. Aspen to bring me to know him—and he did not, or he would not; and now the man is gone nobody knows where, and I shall never perhaps have a chance of knowing him.'

'No,' Granton said gravely, 'you will never have a chance of knowing Ratt Gundy. But why on earth did you want to know him? He was never much of a lady's man, poor Ratt Gundy!'

'As if I cared about a lady's man—as if I could have endured a lady's man! I wanted to see him, to know him, to make him my friend, to get him into my confidence—I wanted to

make him fall in love with me! Yes, I did, and I would have done it too.'

'He wasn't much of a man for falling in love, and I don't believe any woman ever loved him—in that way I mean. But why should you want to make him fall in love with you? You did not propose to marry him, did you?'

'No, I proposed nothing but one thing; I may as well tell you—I always meant to tell you because I thought you might help me to find him—and I may as well tell you now.'

'Why tell me at all?'

'Why not?'

'Because I can't help you—in that or in anything else; nobody gets helped by me, man or woman, to anything good.'

He was speaking in a low, deep tone. He knew something painful was coming, and he shrank from it.

'Ah! but this is not something good—it is something bad, something wicked; it is a purpose which a Christian woman ought not to have, but which I have in my heart, and in my very blood! If Lady Scardale only knew how this thought possesses me, she would think me no longer the girl she cared for and was kind to! Listen, Mr. Granton, my purpose is revenge—revenge!'

'Revenge!' He repeated the word mechanically after her. 'Revenge for what?' He well knew for what while he asked the question.

'Oh, can't you guess? You must have heard the story—revenge for my father's murder.'

'Yes, I have heard the story—that is, I have heard the story of his death. But as I have heard the story told he was not murdered—he was killed in fair fight.'

'Fair fight! I don't believe it. I know he was murdered—and I want to find out who murdered him. That is why I wanted to know this man with the strange name and the strange story—this Ratt Gundy.'

'Did you suppose,' Granton asked, bringing out the words with difficulty, and not looking into the girl's excited face, but keeping his eyes on the ground, 'that it was Ratt Gundy who caused your father's death?'

'No, I didn't. At least, I did not suppose anything about it. But I know, we all know—the papers told us all about it—that Ratt Gundy was out in this place where they found all the diamonds, and got all this odious fortune for some of us—Ratt Gundy was there.'

'Ratt Gundy had left the place a long time. He came here from South America.'

'Oh! then you do know something about him?'

He started. The girl appeared to have caught him again.

'Well, it was all in the papers, you know; but I did know something about him—at one time.'

'Tell me all you know — everything — quick, please. Begin at the beginning, and speak fast.'

'You are so eager,' he said, 'that you put me out. What do you want to know?'

'I want to know anything and everything about Ratt Gundy, because I am certain he could tell me all about my father's death. Why did he never come here? Why would Mr. Aspen never bring him to see me or help me to get to see him? It could only be because he knew something about my father's death which they thought—Mr. Aspen and

he—that it would be too painful for me to hear. Painful! As if it mattered about pain! As if the one great pain to his daughter was not the fact of his being dead—dead—killed—murdered! Well, go on, tell me all about this man.'

'As I heard the story told by Ratt Gundy's own lips——'

'Ah!' Her eyes gleamed. 'You *did* hear the story from him?'

'I was present when he told the story more than once. He said your father was killed in a duel.'

'The old tale! As if that would account for all the mystery that is made about it. As if that would explain my secret conviction. Can you help me to find this Ratt Gundy?'

'No, Miss Locke; I can't do that. You will never see Ratt Gundy. Poor old Ratt Gundy is dead.'

'Dead! Oh no, that can't be. No one said that—the papers all said that he had gone back to South America.'

'Miss Locke, take my word for it, Ratt Gundy will never be seen again by you or any other living creature. Ratt Gundy is dead and buried; he has taken his story, whatever it is, with him, and no voice can call him back.'

'I can't understand this, I can't understand *you*. Is it a riddle?—are you playing with me?'

'As if I would play with you about such a thing!' he exclaimed, in a tone of almost passionate protest.

'Oh no—no—you would not—you would not—it was wrong of me to say such a thing; but I get wild over this, and there seems something mysterious about you, and your very voice does not sound as it did. Mr.

Granton, for pity's sake—for Heaven's sake—for my sake——'

'That's what fetches me most of all,' he interjected: she hardly noticed his interruption.

'For my sake, tell me all you know about my father's death.'

'As Heaven shall judge me, Miss Locke, all I know is that your father was killed in a duel. This is the story I have always heard—I never heard any other—he was killed in a duel, and the man who killed him was as incapable of committing a murder as poor Ratt Gundy or as I myself!'

'The name of the man who killed him—was it not Ratt Gundy?'

Granton drew a deep breath and seemed to be steeling himself up for an effort.

'The name of the man who killed your father was not Ratt Gundy.'

'Oh! Then I am sorry if Ratt Gundy is dead; but I have no further interest in him. I know that is not all the story.'

'It is not all the story.'

'Ha! Did I not say so?'

'It is not all the story. The man who was the real cause of your father's death was not the man whose pistol-ball killed him, but the man who got up the quarrel and made these two men fight—got up the quarrel by lies and calumnies and devilish tricks of all kinds, and set these two men against one another, and boasted afterwards that it was he who had planned it and brought it about.'

'Tell me that man's name.'

'That man's name was Noah Bland—and he is dead. He was lynched for his crimes; he ought to have been lynched long before.'

'He is the father of the Japhet Bland who

is one of the heirs of this wretched, blood-stained money, who can't be found.'

'He is sure to turn up,' Granton said. 'If he is at all like his father he will not leave his money long unclaimed. Some day, you may be sure, he will start up in the midst of us.'

'Oh, hush!' Fidelia suddenly whispered. 'Don't you see? Professor Bos tock!'

Professor Bostock, indeed, had come into the hall and was standing quite near them. He had come in so quietly that neither of them had heard his step. But he always moved quietly. He did not come into a place—he appeared there. He was examining a foil with intent eyes.

He threw himself into a fencing attitude and made a few passes, then stopped and turned towards Fidelia.

'I hope I am not interrupting you,' he said meekly, and sending a deferential glance at Fidelia. He looked uneasy and unwholesome.

'No,' she answered, rather angrily. 'The place is yours more than it is mine or Mr. Granton's.'

'Oh!' He made a gesture as of one who would say, 'If you put it in that cruel way.'

Fidelia took no notice.

'Anyhow, I must go,' Granton said. He was only too well pleased to get a chance of escaping, even for a moment, from Fidelia's further questions.

'Good-bye,' she said, and held out her hand. 'Come again soon.' She gave him an appealing look, which he tried to avoid, but which Bostock saw and fancied he understood.

Rupert murmured some sort of promise and hurried away.

'You are angry with me for coming in,' Bostock said.

'Angry? Nonsense! Why should I be angry?'

'Two are company, and three are none.'

'Mr. Bostock, you seem to me to be in rather a bad temper to-day, and I think your words are a little rude.'

'I did not mean to be rude to you.'

'It does not matter,' Fidelia said, and was turning away from him.

'Don't go yet, Miss Locke,' he said softly. 'I have something to say to you.'

She turned back and looked at him in surprise.

'I could not help hearing something that was said between you and that man as I came in——'

'Oh!' She was going to speak, but he raised his hand deprecatingly and went on.

'I didn't want to listen or to hear, but I could not help it.'

'If you did hear anything of our talk,' she said contemptuously, 'you must know that we spoke on a subject of the most painful interest to me, and I am not likely to want to renew the talk——'

'With me, I suppose?' he asked meekly.

'With everyone—with anyone.'

'I should not think of speaking to you about it, but that you seemed so anxious to hear something about what happened out in those diamond fields.'

She could not choose but listen when any word was spoken on that subject.

'Yes,' she said quickly, almost sharply, 'what do you know about all that?'

'More than you might imagine, Miss Locke; at least, I could get to know a good deal. Mr. Granton does not seem to be able to help you very much about it. Mr. Aspen —won't help you.'

'Oh, then you heard all that? You must have been listening for a good long time.' There was an increasing tone of contempt in her voice.

'Pardon me; I only heard the last few words you were saying, but you will excuse me if I observe that you spoke in a very loud and eager tone.'

'Well, never mind, go on,' she said.

'Only that, if neither of these gentlemen will serve you, I thought perhaps you might give me a chance.'

He turned his eyes on her—they were absolutely expressionless as ever. Fidelia looked into the eyes and noted how they were

discharged of all expression. An uncomfortable and creepy conviction seemed to come over her that the eyes were kept under restraint, and that they could, if they would, blaze out with all manner of emotion. She had for some time felt a little uneasy about her fencing-master. He occasionally paid her elaborate and formal compliments, to which the most sensitive woman could not openly object, but which made her feel as if she would sometimes rather dispense with the fencing lessons. But she was a girl of a good, brave, healthy sort of mind, and she never imagined that every man was likely to fall in love with her. So she repented a little of her sharpness and corrected her sentence.

'If you really know, or could get to know, anything of what happened out—there, Mr. Bostock,' she said, 'you could not do me a greater favour than to tell me something.

Only it is a terrible subject for me, and I do not want to have one moment's idle talk about it. I did talk about it to Mr. Granton, as you seem to have heard, because he had been out there, and I thought he might tell me something—if he knew. I talked to Mr. Aspen about it, as you appear to have heard also, because he is mysteriously mixed up with me in the whole horrible story, and he has lost a father, as I have. But I hardly ever speak of it to Lady Scardale—whom I dearly love—because I know she could not help me. I do not understand how you can know anything about it. You have not been in South Africa?'

'No; I have not been to South Africa or the diamond mines, but I know something about them; and it is easy to get to South Africa nowadays, and if you will let me go I shall find out everything you want to know——'

'If I let you go, Mr. Bostock? I don't understand you; how can I either let you go or keep you back?'

'Can't you understand me—really and truly?' he asked. 'Have you no idea?'

'Not the very slightest.'

'Do you really mean that? Come; you are not like other women—you are not a mere trifler, a coquette.'

Fidelia's brow darkened.

'I hope I am not a trifler or a coquette. But I don't know what that has got to do with it or what we are talking about; and I don't quite see why we should be wasting our time talking about anything. I think I must go, Mr. Bostock.'

She was turning away from him.

'Don't go just yet,' he pleaded.

He had the foil still in his hand, and he made a sudden gesture with it as if he were

interposing it as a barrier between her and the outer world.

'I must tell you something.'

'We have wandered from our subject,' she said anxiously, but not afraid.

'I have not wandered from mine,' he answered. 'It is one of the two subjects I have in my brain and in my heart. Miss Locke, do you know why I consent to spend my life drudging in this hateful school and giving lessons in fencing to silly and stupid and awkward girls?'

Fidelia was inclined for the moment to be a little amused.

'Am I one of the silly and stupid and awkward girls?' she asked, not without a tone of malice in her voice.

'You?—Oh, well, I need not answer that question. Do you know why I give up my life to this place?'

She was almost inclined to reply that she assumed it was because Lady Scardale paid him a very good salary for his very good fencing lessons, but his face looked too serious for such a reply. So she only said in a tone of conciliation:

'I presume, Mr. Bostock, you take an interest in your craft, which you can practise so well.'

'It isn't that,' he said abruptly. 'Do you think I was made to live the life of a teacher in a girls' school?'

Fidelia, in truth, could not answer the question. She had never given it any thought. She had accepted it as one of the natural conditions of things that a clever fencing-master could be found for a college like that of Lady Scardale, no matter whether the fencing-master had to teach girls or boys. She had never noticed anything much in Mr.

Bostock, except his remarkable skill in fence, and his quiet, suppressed, methodical ways. Therefore she felt herself embarrassed when suddenly confronted with a question never presented to her before, and which seemed to start a kind of mystery to explain what seemed a very commonplace business, not calling for any explanation. But she could also see that Mr. Bostock was entirely in earnest in putting his question.

'Mr. Bostock,' she answered, very gravely and respectfully, 'I suppose many people or most people have to lead lives which they do not find altogether suited to their feelings and their tastes. This may, of course, be your lot, as it is the lot of others.'

'Do you mean to tell me,' he said, with the same expressionless face, but with deep emotion in his tones, 'that you have no idea why I pass my life in this place?'

'Unless for the ordinary and obvious reasons, no idea—none whatever. I have not thought about it——'

'It was no affair of yours?' he broke in sharply.

'If you wish to put it so, yes—it was no affair of mine, Mr. Bostock. I should rather put it that I had no right to form any conjectures as to your motives.'

'It *was* an affair of yours,' he said, with deep, repressed passion in his voice, 'and you *have* a right to form a conjecture. I stay here because *you* are here. I came here because you are here——'

'Stop, Mr. Bostock! pray stop, do stop——'

'I am not likely to stop now, having gone so far. I must go on—I love you!'

Fidelia began to think she had to deal with a madman. Something of this thought seemed

to publish itself in her face, for he quickly said:

'You think I am mad, perhaps. Well, I daresay I am; every man is mad, in a sense, who falls desperately in love with a woman, and if so, I am mad, for I am desperately in love with you. But I am sane enough in other ways, and I mean to carry my point in this. I am going to be rich—ay, ever so rich—and I shall have power, and I am not a man to let anything stand in my way, and, Fidelia Locke, I love you! Come, can you love me? Don't think of me as the poor drudge of a girls' school; that isn't my vocation any more than my name is Bostock; our lives are bound up together and our destinies in a way you little dream of. Come, can you love me?'

He flung away his foil, which went clatter-

ing on the floor, folded his arms, and stood quietly before her waiting for an answer.

If only anybody would come—a student, a servant, anyone! Fidelia glanced uneasily round the great room, but there was no one. Oh, if Lady Scardale would come! She did not know what to say or how to act; but she had a general conviction that the moment was one for keeping cool and avoiding the tragic.

'Mr. Bostock,' she said at last, 'you must not be surprised if I refuse to take all things quite seriously.'

'It is very serious for me,' he said grimly; 'it will be very serious for you as well, and for others too.'

Then Fidelia lost her temper.

'You are threatening me, Mr. Bostock,' she said, 'and I can only tell you that I am not the least in the world frightened by your

threats. No, I am glad you have threatened me, because it gives me the right to say that I have nothing to do with you and that I defy you.'

'You shall not defy me long,' he growled; 'you do not know who I am or what I can do.'

'I do not know, and I do not care. Let us have an end of this, Mr. Bostock. We must continue to meet, for I cannot have Lady Scardale disturbed by reports of such stuff; let us meet as mere fellow-workers in this college, until, perhaps, some future day we may be able to meet again as friends.'

She endeavoured to put some softening tone of kindliness, of a hope for reconciliation, into her closing words.

'Never!' he replied; 'we can never be friends. I would rather be hated by you than looked on merely as a milk-and-water

friend. I am a man who has no friends, and does not want any. I have enemies, and I make them, and I get rid of them when I can. I have had to make my own way in the world, and I have made it, and I will make it. And I let nothing stand in my way; and I shall conquer you, too, in the end.'

'This is all too melodramatic for me,' Fidelia said, 'and I have no taste for melodrama.'

'Have you no feeling for a man who loves you?'

'I don't believe there is any love in that, and if there is I hate such love, and I despise it. Do you think a girl is to be frightened and—and—bullied into falling in love with the first man who gets it into his head that he is falling in love with her? Come, Mr. Bostock, drop all this nonsense, and let us get into the commonplace again.'

'Will you not allow me to assist you in finding out all about your father?'

'Oh, hush!' she exclaimed, 'do not let us bring his name into this odious talk.'

'Will you not let me help you? I can help you as nobody else can. Will you not take my help in this?'

'Not in this or in anything else until we return to the old conditions of the commonplace. Oh, thank Heaven!'

These last words were uttered in an undertone, and with a deep-drawn breath of relief, for one of the attendant women was coming towards her with a salver and a card on it. That would have been a strange visitor indeed who was not welcome to Fidelia just then. A flush came into her face as she took the card. It bore the name of Gerald Aspen.

'Show Mr. Aspen in,' she said, with an air of hardly concealed delight and triumph.

'You will not tell?' Bostock hastily began.

'I never tell tales out of school' was Fidelia's almost contemptuous reply.

'You will keep to yourself what I have told you?'

'Keep it to *yourself* for the future,' she answered, 'and you may feel sure that I will keep it to myself.'

At that moment Gerald Aspen entered the room. Bostock saluted him grimly, and then vanished. Gerald had not eyes for him. He had only eyes for Fidelia, and for the look of unmistakable joy that came into her face. The pain and strain of her talk with Bostock had been too much for her, and the sudden relief caused by Gerald's coming had swelled her emotion to overflow. A man should have been dull indeed who mistook the welcoming look in her eyes.

'I am so glad you have come,' she said, and, in her impulsive way, she stretched out both her hands to him.

Ignorant Gerald! Why had he never known that if she was constrained with him, and perfectly easy, familiar, and friendly with Rupert Granton, it was because she had no feeling which could make her embarrassed in her relations with Rupert Granton and she had much feeling to embarrass her in her relations with *him*? How could she be perfectly open and frank and unembarrassed with him? How was she to know the true nature of his feelings towards her? She might be allowing herself to go too far; she might have been showing her hand; she might have been—to put it in better words—showing her love. She might have been making overtures such as no true girl would make until she is well assured in her own mind and

heart that these overtures are to be becomingly returned. Gerald, though a society journalist, was a somewhat shy and modest young man in the presence of women; and this one particular woman had an influence over him that sometimes made him tremble and blush in her presence.

'Has anything happened?' he asked. 'Have you been alarmed by anything?'

'No. I have been talking to Mr. Bostock —and he is a strange man—but it is nothing.'

'Will you come and walk in the grounds?' he asked timidly.

CHAPTER XVII

IN RANELAGH GARDENS

'No, not in the grounds,' Fidelia said hurriedly, 'but somewhere else if you like. I don't want to walk in the grounds just now—I don't know why.'

'Something *has* happened to disturb you?'

'No, no; please don't ask me any questions.' She became embarrassed and impulsive—embarrassment always leads to impulsiveness—in her anxiety to avoid any cross-examination about Bostock, concerning whom she was much more alarmed than she would have cared to admit, even to herself; and of all men in the world she would least have wished to bring Gerald into this affair.

So, to save herself from having to be truthful, she had to put on a false air of coquetry.

'If you really don't want to walk out with me,' she said, 'of course, I don't mean to press you——'

'If I don't want to walk out with you!'

'Yes; very well, you need not protest—then if you *do* want to walk out with me, I don't see why we might not walk in Ranelagh Gardens. Have you ever walked in Ranelagh Gardens?'

Gerald did not know what he answered. At the moment he did not remember whether he had ever walked in Ranelagh Gardens or not. What did he care? He knew he was going to walk with Fidelia Locke there now, and that was enough for him.

It was a summer evening—an hour before sunset—and he was to dine out that evening. He would probably be a little late for his

dinner-party, but that did not much concern him. He felt all aflame. He was sure that a crisis was coming. The walk in Ranelagh Gardens he felt must decide his fate. If he was mistaken—if Fidelia was only animated by some excitement which had nothing to do with him—then the sooner he knew it the better. Never could he have again so good a chance as now. Ah! surely, surely, he could not have misinterpreted the welcoming glance in her eyes when he came into the hall and found her with Bostock. If that gleam of light did not mean love—ah, then he had read poems and dreamed dreams to no purpose, and all in vain!

'My fate cries out!' he said to himself, in the words of Hamlet.

All this he thought of while Fidelia was putting on her hat to go with him to Ranelagh Gardens.

A moment or two later—they had to travel but a little distance—they were walking in the gardens that bear the famous name of Ranelagh. Neither knew nor cared about the traditions of the place. Fidelia probably did not even know what had been its traditions. Gerald was not then in a mind to concern himself about them. All the beaux and belles, all the bucks and dandies and dandizettes, who had once enlivened the gardens with their more or less vapid laughter, might never have lived so far as these young lovers were concerned. For Gerald all the storied memories of all the ages were summed up in the one thought, that he was with Fidelia Locke in a lonely garden of Chelsea, and that he had made up his mind to tell her there and then that he loved her. Out of that garden she should not go until he had told her of his love. Come what would he

must tell her that. Not another day must pass. When she went to rest that night she must bear with her to her pillow the knowledge that he loved her. Would it surprise her? Would it shock her? Would she have to tell him that she could not give back his love—that she would always regard him as a brother—and all that sad, crushing, commonplace of excuse? As if a man who wanted to be a lover ever cared about being considered a brother! That very thought was passing through Gerald's mind at the moment—the very same thought that Bostock had lately put into words: 'I would rather she told me that she hated me,' he said to himself, 'than that she regarded me as a brother.' But was it possible she could hate him? She had been always sweetly frank and friendly to him. No, she did not hate him; that was certain. It was clear that she liked his companion-

ship. But a woman may like, and even dearly like, a man's companionship without being in the least degree in love with him, or having the faintest inclination to marry him, and this Gerald thoroughly understood. He was even inclined to draw evil augury from her present liking for his companionship. If she were in love with him she would seem less at her ease in his society than she did that day; she would not have asked him to walk out with her; she would not have said so outspokenly that she was glad when he came. Thus he thought, tormenting himself and contradicting himself after the true lover's immemorial way. But it must all be settled then and there—before they passed forth of that gateway again.

He did not come to it quickly, however. He and she talked slowly and in low tones about all manner of things which little

concerned them or anybody else. The sun was about to sink, and Gerald knew that Fidelia would have soon to go home. Would he fail of his purpose after all? No; he determined that, if he reached that period of their walk when he had only time left to say, 'Fidelia, I love you—will you be my wife?' he would say it and get her answer. He could not face a new day with the doubt, and the uncertainty, and the suspense.

'See,' she said, 'the sun is going down, and everybody is gone.'

'The everybodies were very few to begin with,' he answered, somewhat vapidly, 'and their disappearance does not make much difference.'

'But we ought to be going too.'

'Why ought we?'

'Well, I don't know, but I suppose they will soon want to close the gates, and we

can't exactly allow ourselves to be locked in!'

'Oh, they will be sure to come and tell us; and why should we not allow ourselves to be locked in?'

'And spend the night wandering in this garden?'

'I should like it of all things.'

'Ridiculous!' she said, with a slight flush on her face. 'We should catch fearful colds; and what would Lady Scardale say?'

'She would think I was very happy,' Gerald said defiantly.

Fidelia looked at him wonderingly, and her heart began to beat more quickly.

'Come,' she said decisively, 'we must go.'

'Wait a little; I—I—have something to say to you—Fidelia.'

He had never called her by her name

before. She panted, and her eyes grew dim. She knew what was coming now.

'Is it not strange,' he said impetuously, determined to get to the end of it, 'is it not strange, Fidelia, how you and I have been thrown together—how a sort of mysterious common destiny has twined itself around us both and brought us both at the same time calamity and fortune? Is it not a wonderful thing?'

'It is, indeed,' she said slowly, 'a strange story.'

'Fancy,' he said, 'six months ago I was a poor young journalist, and I had never heard of the diamond mine, and I had never heard of you.'

'And I had never heard of the diamond mine, and I had never heard of you. And I believed my father was living, and that I

should see him again. Now I know that he is dead.'

'Yes,' Gerald interposed hastily, 'and I then thought my father was living too, and now know that he is dead.'

He hastened over all this, for he could not pretend that their sorrow was equal; he could not persuade himself that he grieved for his father as she grieved for hers. Gerald was almost jealous of her grief for the loss of her father, almost resented it.

'I didn't mean that,' he added; 'I was thinking of how you and I have been brought together, and of the stupid life I was leading before I knew you, and how strangely we have been brought together and linked together in this story which no one would think of believing if it was made into a romance. Doesn't it all mean something, Fidelia?'

She opened her eyes with a sort of start.

'You make me start,' she said, 'when you call me by my name.' Then she wished she had not said anything about it.

'Are you angry?' he asked. 'Would you rather I did not call you by your name?'

'It does not matter, but I am not used to it, and it made me start. You never called me Fidelia before.'

'One must begin sometime.'

'Must one?—why?'

'Oh, you know why!' he exclaimed. 'You must know quite well—because I love you, Fidelia—because I am in love with you, and because I want you to be my wife.'

There was a moment's pause, and Gerald waited in an agony of silence. Yet even then he was glad he had spoken. It was done; it was out; it was a relief.

'Call me Fidelia,' she said, 'always.'

'Oh, you darling!' he exclaimed, and he put his arm round her waist and drew her to him and kissed her. There was no looker-on save alone the kindly sun, and even he was about to withdraw below the horizon and allow this young lover unseen to kiss his true love once again.

'Fidelia!' he exclaimed; 'Fidelia always —but not Fidelia Locke?'

'Not always,' she said, with a smile struggling against tears; 'soon it may be Fidelia'—a long pause—'Fidelia Aspen.'

Then they passed out of the garden and then walked home together. 'Ah, bear in mind that garden was enchanted!' So Edgar Poe bids us to remember of the garden where his lover first saw and last saw his mystic, unforgotten Helen. That Ranelagh Garden will always be enchanted for Gerald

and for Fidelia. No spot on earth will ever for either of them have the magic sweetness, the delight, the perfume of that lonely nook in Chelsea, where Gerald found courage to put his love into words.

'You do care about me?' he asked, as they were passing out of the gates.

'Oh yes. If I didn't, do you think I should not have let you know?'

'Yes, yes, of course,' he answered awkwardly; 'I hardly knew what I was saying—I am so happy, Fidelia.'

'And I, too,' she said frankly and simply.

'I suppose you knew that I was in love with you?' he asked, looking closely at her for the first time since his declaration.

'Oh yes,' was her straightforward answer; and then her eyelids went down

and a deepened colour came into her cheek.

'How long have you known it?'

'I can't tell—ever so long.'

'And—tell me—how long have you cared for me?'

'I don't know; I suppose ever since you began to care for me.'

'How strange,' he said musingly, 'we have no one to consult about all this—we have no kith or kin, you and I—we are absolutely free to do as we please with our own lives.'

'No,' she said solemnly, looking up at him, 'I have my father.'

'Fidelia—your father!'

'Yes. I must find out about him and his death before I can marry you, Gerald.'

A pang of disappointment and a thrill

of delight went through him. He was disappointed to hear that anything depended on the quest into her father's fate—he was delighted to hear her for the first time call him Gerald.

'Fidelia,' he remonstrated very tenderly, 'you have promised me—you have as good as given me your word.'

'Oh yes, Gerald, I will be your wife—if you wish it—for I love you—but we must first find out how my father was killed.'

'Suppose we cannot find out?'

'But we can. You will help me. If we married first I might get to be too happy—I might become entirely wrapped up in my love for you and in my selfish happiness—and I might forget what I owe to my dear lost father. You will help me to find out—you will be all the more eager to help me—because of my resolve.'

'Are you really determined on this, Fidelia?'

'Quite determined, Gerald; and if I were not I should expect you and ask of you to keep me up to my resolve.'

'I don't believe you really love me at all,' he said passionately. For the moment his disappointment was profound.

'I love you,' she protested, 'with all my soul and with all my strength. I have never felt one touch of love before—but I must keep to this resolve, Gerald—and you must help to keep me to it.' She looked with utter confidence into his eyes.

Gerald's heart was torn with distracting emotions.

She loved him—loved him—loved no one else; that was the first thought. All his alarms about Rupert Granton had been utterly without foundation. That ought to be enough

to fill his soul with happiness. But then came the bitter thought, 'She will not marry me.' For that was what it came to. She would not marry until she had found out all about her father's death, and he, Gerald, must help her to find it out. And he, Gerald, already knew all about it that was to be known, and he could not tell her. He could not in conscience and in honour betray the secret of Rupert Granton —no, he could not do that even to have Fidelia Locke for his wife. He could not ask Granton to save him by revealing the whole story—he could not ask Granton to make himself odious to Fidelia and an object of repugnance to Lady Scardale by avowing that he had killed Fidelia's father. Granton had generously trusted him and he could not betray the confidence. Would Fidelia cling to her purpose? Alas! he feared that she would. He had seen that purpose growing up in her,

and he did not believe it would wither. It was founded on an entirely wrong impression —on the conviction that her father had been foully murdered; if that conviction could be removed the purpose would go with it; but how could it be removed? Only one man living could put the story in its true light to Fidelia, and that man was Rupert Granton; and he could only do that by proclaiming that his was the hand which had done her father to death.

Again, Gerald felt as if it would be playing false with the girl's feelings if he were to profess or pretend that he was assisting her in finding out all about her father's death. This would be to enact a dismal farce and to make the girl he loved an unconscious performer in it. Look what way he would, the prospect seemed one only of disappointment, of distress, and even of despair.

There was a moment's pause. The lovers

were pacing alone one of the deserted streets of the Chelsea region. They had it all to themselves. Nothing could well be more lonely. The storied lovers who were cast ashore on the hitherto uninhabited island of Madeira could hardly have felt themselves more apart from the rush of human life than this pair lingering in a street on the edge of the Thames, and within an eighteenpenny cab-fare of the Houses of Parliament and the Charing Cross station.

Then Gerald spoke in a timid, embarrassed sort of way. Elderly readers will understand it perhaps even better than the younger, to whom the sensation, if they have had it, is still too near to be quite crystallised into permanent form. Gerald felt all that exquisite, that delightful shyness which comes to a young man when, for the first time in his life, a sweet girl imposes on him the responsi-

bilities of her destiny. It is a rare moment—after-life has perhaps nothing quite equal to it.

'Couldn't I help you better as—as—your husband, Fidelia?' he stammered out in an awkward sort of way.

'No,' she said fervently, 'no, Gerald. I feel as if I had no right to any happiness, and as if the man I loved had no right to any happiness—and you are the man I love, Gerald—until I had tried to do my duty to my dear father, my murdered father. I feel like one of the girls in the Greek poems, don't you know, that have been translated for us at the college—the girls who had to fulfil some solemn task for a father or a brother or a sister, and who had to do that before they could pretend to try to be happy. You will indulge me in this; you will help me in this—you will—oh, you will—my dear?'

There was passion in her voice. The

glory of the sinking sun was on her face. They were now near to the gate of the Culture College. Gerald would have longed to kiss her, but he could not attempt it then and there.

'I love you—I adore you!' was all he said.

'Good-night.'

'Good-night, Gerald.'

So they parted for the evening, and went their ways with somewhat different emotions. Gerald was indeed happy to know that Fidelia loved him—to be relieved from all torturing doubts on that great hope of his life. But with the exacting, unsatisfied impatience of the man, he was troubled because of the condition imposed by Fidelia on their love, and the difficulty of his fulfilling it. He might have known that since the girl loved him she would find a way somehow to make it easy for him to come to his heart's desire.

The reasonable part of his trouble was that he could not be quite frank with her—for complete frankness would have meant the betrayal of the secret of another. Fidelia for her part was wrapped in a measureless content. She had loved him from the first—now she knew that he loved her. She assumed—she took it for granted—that he would devote himself to her purpose as regarded her father's death, and would make it a purpose of his own. She had all the sweet unreasonableness, and the unquestioning, instinctive trust of a woman in her lover—the feeling that 'whatever I want him to do, that he will wish to do.' She also had a curious feminine sense of newly-found protection—the exquisite delight of resting on a strength stronger than her own. 'Gerald will make everything easy for me'—such was her feeling. The very talk with Bostock that day brought

her with its memory a new sense of protection. There was a vague alarm lingering in her because of Bostock's declarations to her—the utterly unexpected avowal of his love—his threats, his agitating announcement that he was not really the man he professed to be, and did not own the name he professed to bear. She felt guarded against all that danger now—if danger there should be—for Gerald would take care of her. Yet she could not tell that story to Gerald—just yet. She, too, had to keep her secret. So they parted—this true pair of lovers—each having something on the mind which as yet the other must not be allowed to know.

But of the two, Fidelia was the more happy, although she did not for that night tell the story of her happiness to Lady Scardale. She felt timid and shy about the confession of her love.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AFFAIR ON THE EMBANKMENT

Ever since the bungle and blunder at the fencing scene Mr. Bostock had been prodigal in his civilities to Gerald Aspen. The fencing-master seemed as if he could not do enough to efface from Gerald's mind the memory of that unhappy accident. Gerald in his genial way would have cared nothing at all about it. His absolutely unsuspicious nature would not have allowed or encouraged a sinister thought to enter it. He was greatly touched by the extreme and unnecessary amount of penitence that Bostock showed. 'As if he could have helped it, poor fellow!' Gerald said to himself more than once. To him it was simply

like the case of some accident at a shooting party, where the gun of a friend by mishap gives you a hurt, and you feel at once that the injured man suffers far less than the innocent injurer.

The doubts and surmises of Rupert Granton were wholly thrown away on Gerald Aspen. Gerald began to take a liking to the professor of fencing, because the professor had inadvertently wounded him, and was so very sorry for it.

So Gerald invited him to dine at the Voyagers' Club, and the professor came and was introduced to Captain Jackdaw, in whom he took an immense interest as a partner in the great diamond-mine scheme, of which so much had been heard. Then Captain Jackdaw, in his genial offhand sort of way, invited Gerald and Bostock to dine with him at the Voyagers' Club another night, and they

went, and they dined, and had some pleasant talk.

'It's very funny, you know,' said Captain Raven, on this second occasion, 'our going to be rich in this sort of way. But I say, I wish, Aspen—don't you?—they could make us rich, I mean could give us our money, as I suppose it is ours, all at once. It's a beastly nuisance holding on until the 1st of January next. Suppose a fellow goes and dies in the meantime, then what good has he out of it, I want to know?'

'Unless the comfort of leaving it to his widow,' the serious professor solemnly remarked.

'But I haven't any wife,' Raven observed, 'and consequently I can't have any widow. That seems good sense—eh, Mr. Bostock?'

'I haven't any wife either,' Gerald said.

Mr. Bostock became silent at once.

Naturally the whole subject did not intimately concern him. Why should it? Here were two young men, one of them a tremendous swell, the other a young favourite of fortune —both of them to be rich men on the first of the coming January—and what had he, Bostock, a poor fencing-master at the College of Culture, to do with their concerns? So he remained silent—and the conversation changed. Possibly he may have noted the fact that they neither of them seemed to have thought of making any provision for a transfer of their property, if such transfer were practicable, in the event of either's sudden death. But, after all, why should he notice a fact like that, and wherein could it concern him?

The dinner was early, and Raven had to go off somewhere else. Gerald wished to leave a message—for Lady Scardale, no doubt —at the College of Culture. Bostock lived

not very far from the college—on the Battersea side—in the shadow of the church where Bolingbroke lies buried. So Gerald proposed that they should have a hansom together to the College of Culture—which they had—and Gerald paid the fare. Then Gerald left his message—for Lady Scardale, no doubt—and the young men started to walk away together. It was a lovely starlit night, and the moon was shining on the river and making the Thames—with the low-lying Surrey shore and the small trees on the Surrey shore—look curiously like the stream of the Nile. Gerald felt all the influence of the night. Bostock had lately been very silent.

'Come,' Gerald said, 'Bostock, I'll see you on your way as far as the other side of the bridge.'

So they crossed the bridge together, and then they recrossed it—taken, no doubt, by

the beauty of the night—and perhaps taken, too, by the thought that each had something in his mind which was likely to be in the mind of the other.

When they came again to the Middlesex side, Mr. Bostock abruptly turned the talk into quite a new direction. They had been talking commonplaces and the fine weather. Gerald had been seeing Fidelia in the light of every star and the moonlit ripple of every wave.

'You have all the luck, Mr. Aspen,' the professor of fencing said despondently.

'Have I?' Gerald asked, and then he answered himself cheerily. 'Well, I certainly have had a marvellous amount of luck lately, Professor Bostock. I am to be a rich man at the beginning of the year, but up to this time I have had to make a pretty hard fight of it, I may as well say.'

'Ah, but it isn't that only,' Bostock slowly said.

'Not that only—that is a good deal, is it not, for a man only starting in life?'

'It's a good deal—but it is not all, or nearly all. You have won more than money—you have won—love.'

Gerald started.

'What do you mean—why do you talk of that?'

'Because I have been in love myself; because I have a heart to feel and eyes to see—and I know how you are favoured by destiny—and by *her*! Do not be angry, and do not think me wanting in delicacy—Mr. Aspen, we have been rowing in the same boat for a long time—although I must own, as the old jest has it, not with the same sculls. Not with the same gifts, and graces, and good fortune certainly!'

'I say, Bostock,' Gerald interposed, with abrupt and boyish good humour, 'you haven't been keeping out the fog at all, have you?'

'Keeping out the fog? What fog? I don't quite follow you, Mr. Aspen. There isn't any fog—it is a bright full moon—see! I am not clever at all, except at fencing—intellectually, you know, I am very dull. What do you mean by keeping out the fog?'

'Well, to tell you the honest truth, I thought you might have been drinking a little too much at the Voyagers', perhaps.'

'Drinking? Oh no, Mr. Aspen, I drink very little. I haven't the means to afford much drinking—and what,' he added, with a sickly smile, 'would become of the wrist and the nerves of a professor of fencing who drank?'

'You are right there,' Aspen said, 'and I ask your pardon, for I well know how you can fence. But I thought you were talking

a little wildly all the same—and about things that did not quite concern you.'

'Yes, but they do concern me,' Bostock said gravely. 'At least, in a sense they do. I don't suppose things would ever have been different with me anyhow, if you had never come on the scene. She would never have cared for me, I suppose—and of all men I have ever seen, I would rather you won her—since it is sure as fate that I could never have a chance.'

'In the name of Heaven, Mr. Bostock,' Aspen said, stopping suddenly, and facing his extraordinary companion, 'what are you talking about—and why do you talk to me at all?'

'You know well enough what I am talking to you about—and why I am talking to you is because I do not wish you to think too badly of me, or to think I hate you

because you have succeeded where I have utterly failed—and where I never had from the beginning the remotest chance of success. I am talking of Miss Fidelia Locke.'

'I'd rather we didn't talk of Miss Locke, Mr. Bostock, if you please. I don't see what you have to do with her.'

'Nothing,' Bostock said, shrugging his shoulders and turning out his hands in meekest deprecation. 'You are right—I have nothing to do with her. But I use the right of every man that lives, and I love a woman when she seems to me to be worth a man's love. So I have loved Miss Fidelia Locke ever so long. Am I a criminal for that? Can I help it? I have been seeing her, talking with her, fencing with her, every day—am I to be blamed because I have a man's feelings, and she is a glorious girl?'

'Not blamed by me, certainly,' Gerald said gently. This was all new and startling to him. He had never known anything about it—never thought of it—before. The professor of fencing seemed to him to stand on much the same level as the hairdresser, who came to look after the tresses of the young women at the Culture College. But there was an unmistakable note of sincerity, he thought, in the words of the poor professor, and Gerald, out of the lordliness of his own success and his own certainty, felt a generous sympathy for the man who had never even ventured to put his fate to the test.

'I'm glad to hear you say so,' Bostock replied meekly. 'I should like to keep your good opinion—I should like you to know how thoroughly I understand that I never had a chance from the very first—never could have

had—and that I am only too glad she has given her love to you, and not to that man Granton.'

'Well, well—I think we had better not talk about these things. I don't know whether Granton ever had any thoughts that way. At all events, that is no affair of yours or mine. If you are at all a sufferer, Mr. Bostock, believe me I am sorry for it, and I think all the better of you for it, and for the manly, courageous way in which you have spoken about it. But I am sure we ought not ever to speak of it any more.'

'No, no, certainly not,' Bostock said eagerly; 'my mind is quite relieved. I have said all I had to say. I wanted you to know that I understood how things had gone, and that I had no enmity, and that I bore no malice, and that I knew well you had not

come between me and anything that could have been mine—because I know it never could have been mine. There, Mr. Aspen, that's all about it, and I congratulate you on your expected property, and your other and better good fortune as well; and now I drop the subject and become the stolid self-contained professor of fencing again. Oh! just one word. Did she never tell you anything of this?'

'She?'

'Miss Locke, of course.'

'She? Why, man, how should she know?'

'Ah, to be sure,' Bostock said meditatively, 'how should she know it? To be sure—how should she know it?'

There was something in the tone of Bostock's voice now that grated on Aspen's nerves.

'I don't suppose you ever tried to tell her anything?'

'I thought, perhaps, she might have

guessed,' Bostock said humbly; 'women are so quick and clever at guessing that sort of thing. And I thought, perhaps, she might have told you; girls are fond of telling the men they love about the men who loved them.'

Something in all this irritated Aspen beyond endurance, although he believed it to be only Bostock's awkward way of expressing his meaning. Still, he could not bear to hear the name of Fidelia mixed up in any such talk.

'To cut this all short, Bostock,' he said, 'I don't believe that Miss Locke ever mentioned your name to me.'

Was this what Bostock wanted to get at? Was it to this he had led up? Did he want to feel assured that his one effort at love-making had not come to the knowledge of Aspen, so as to make Aspen dislike and dis-

trust him, and stand on his guard against him? Perhaps so. At any rate, he changed the conversation quickly.

'I wonder,' he said, 'what has become of that man Ratt Gundy?'

'Ah, I wonder,' was the only reply of Aspen.

'Strange that he should have disappeared so soon, when the money has not yet been shared.'

'Well, I dare say he will turn up at the right time and claim his share. You see, he was always a wanderer and a globe-trotter. And then he is not the only one who is missing at the moment. Where, I wonder, is the young man, Japhet Bland?'

'Ah, I wonder!' was the echoing remark of the professor of fencing.

'Don't you suppose he'll turn up at the right time?' Gerald asked contemptuously.

'If he is at all like his father's son, he'll not lose the chance of the money, you may be sure.'

'Did you know his father?' Bostock grimly asked.

'No, I never knew his father, but I have heard all about him, from Seth Chickering and——'

'And from Gundy?'

'And from Gundy; yes.'

'These men may have been his enemies.'

'Anyhow, it does not concern you or me,' Gerald said abruptly, being a little weary of the talk.

'You haven't any suspicions of Ratt Gundy?'

'Suspicions about what?'

'That murder of Seth Chickering?'

'Stuff and nonsense! Why should I have suspicions of him?'

'Well, people had, you know; he was found on the spot.'

'Yes, he gave the alarm; he tried to stop the man who was running away. Why, confound it all, Bostock,' Aspen said, with a rush of recollection coming back upon him, 'you yourself swore that you saw the very man whom he described on that very same night!'

'So I did, and I saw him. But he may have been sent there; he may have been set on and paid to do the trick, and another man may have planted him in the way to do it. Do you know that I fancied I saw that very same face close to us—to you and me—this very night?'

'Close to us! My dear Mr. Bostock, you are dreaming—close to us, when and where?'

'Just after we came out from the college, in the dark street, I saw a face flash past me

—just like his—I do not easily forget faces. Do you know where we passed the little sugar factory—sweetmeat factory, whatever it is? There was a crowd coming out, of working lads and working girls——'

'Yes, yes, I saw——'

'Well, among that crowd I seemed to see that face.'

'Absurd,' Gerald said; 'some mere chance likeness. Anyhow, I don't suppose he particularly wants to murder you or me, and I suppose, even if he had any such design, we could hold our own, so long as he did not attack us from behind. We are pretty good at defending ourselves, you and I.'

'Yes,' Bostock answered lugubriously. 'But such a man generally does attack one from behind?'

'But what on earth could be his motive for attacking you or me?'

'No motive for attacking me, certainly. But suppose he were to get rid of you?'

'Well, what good would that do him?'

'There would be one more gone.'

'One more?'

'One more out of the claimants to the inheritance—one more besides Seth Chickering. When the stakes come to be divided in January there would be so much the more to get.'

'For the assassin? For our mysterious friend with the shock head and the red beard!'

'Oh no—for the man who set him on — for Ratt Gundy, perhaps — who knows?'

Gerald burst into a peal of laughter.

'Mr. Bostock, you ought to have belonged to my profession. You ought to have been a journalist. Or, better still, you ought to have

been a sensation novelist. Well, I must go home. Good-night—and don't think any more about all this imaginary danger.'

'It is danger for you—not for me.'

'I know, and it's very kind of you, but there's danger for nobody. And so, good-night.'

'I wish you would let me go with you,' said Bostock in a curious pleading tone of voice.

'Why on earth should you go with me?'

'Because it is late and dark—and I am haunted by the face of that man—and he would never think of attacking two people—and I am tremendously strong in the arm.'

'My good fellow, this is too ridiculous. But I am much obliged to you all the same, Bostock'—he hastily corrected the tone of his voice, for he was really touched by Bostock's

kind, albeit somewhat absurd, anxiety, on his account—'and I know you are a good fellow—and I wish you good luck—in everything, old man, except the one thing about which I can't afford to wish good luck to any one but myself.' He spoke sympathetically and kindly, for he began to think that in his heart he had been doing wrong to Bostock. But he would not hear of Bostock's accompanying him any farther, and so on the Chelsea side of the bridge they bade each other good-night and parted.

Gerald lit a cigar and sauntered slowly along the Thames Embankment. He was not thinking much of what Bostock had been telling him. He was a little amused at Bostock's theory about Ratt Gundy. Knowing who Ratt Gundy was, he could well afford to be amused at that. The theory of a mysterious red-bearded assassin, going about

killing people systematically to carry out a Tontine principle in the distribution of a great fortune, seemed to him much too ridiculous even for the sensation novel. This night, as he walked home, his thoughts, to say the truth, ran mostly on his happy love-making, and on Fidelia Locke. It is marvellous how to a young man the whole universe can become absorbed into the being of his sweetheart, until nothing else seems worthy of a moment's concern. Gerald passed little groups of people, young men and young women, walking three abreast, four abreast, six abreast, in loose marching order, or sometimes with ranks very much closed up, and with loving arms around freely consenting waists. Many wayfarers trod behind him, and soon passed him, or turned off in some other direction. He took no account of them. Presently, the Embankment grew more and

more lonely. At one moment it was curiously borne in upon him that he had the walk almost all to himself—he could only hear one footfall behind him. But as he passed one of the benches it seemed to him as if he saw a man lying upon it. Nothing out of the common, surely. In all weather, winter and summer, there are figures seen resting all night through on the benches of the Thames Embankment. A sad study for statesmanship that—whenever statesmanship can find spare time to look after it—that all night long in summer and in winter there are men and women who make a bench on the Thames Embankment their bed-chamber. Of one thing we may be sure—they would not sleep there in the fogs of winter or the blustering winds of spring, or the chill nights of late autumn, if they could possibly find a more warm and comfortable place of rest. A fact,

perhaps, that statesmanship will have to take very carefully into account some day.

A vague thought of this kind was passing through Gerald's brain as he saw, or thought he saw, the outcast on the bench. But another thought was mingled up with it—for he fancied that as the face of the sleeper was lighted by the moon he could see that it had shock red hair and a red beard. Then he smiled to himself at his own folly—and he stopped to light another cigar.

The moment his fusee flashed out in the air, it seemed to him as if another flash came on him from behind. It might have been for all seeming the crash of a thunderbolt—the sharp, swift sabre-cut of a sunstroke—he was only suddenly conscious that something had happened to him. Something had struck him from behind. The cigar dropped from his

lips—his fusee went sparkling and spluttering along the pavement—he faced round and certainly had a clear picture of a man with red hair and a red beard who was striking at him again and again, and he tried to grapple with his assailant—and he fell from sheer faintness on the ground. And then he distinctly heard the familiar voice of Professor Bostock call out, 'You murderer, you scoundrel! I have got you—no, I'll never let you go unless you kill me as you have killed him' —and he seemed to understand it all, and how Bostock had followed him to watch over his safety—and then he made an effort to rise in defence of Bostock against the assassin who would now have Bostock only to deal with—and then a peculiarly sweet and soothing sensation took possession of him—a sense of relief, and lassitude, and rest—and he thought for one exquisite second that he could see the

face of Fidelia bending lovingly down to him out of the starry sky—and then his eyes closed languidly, and Bostock, and the murderer, and the struggle, and Bostock's present danger were all forgotten, and Gerald sank into a swoon.

CHAPTER XIX

GERALD RAVES

Poor Gerald was quite right when, in his fading senses as the blow told upon him, he thought he knew the voice of Bostock coming to his help. For now standing over his fallen body is Bostock himself—and alone. The assassin must have escaped, and Bostock is examining into the nature of the hurt.

'Confound it all,' he muttered, 'the fellow's not dead yet,' and then he was making a sudden movement with his right hand, when he heard the hurried tramp of a policeman's feet and the shrill sound of a policeman's whistle, and he let Gerald's head fall, and he accompanied the fall with an

execration below his breath. Then he called to the approaching policeman. 'Look here, I say, why don't you watch this Embankment? Here has been an attempt at murder, and if I hadn't happened to be near it would have been murder all out. Whistle again for some of your men—this poor chap is in a bad way.'

'Who's done it?' the policeman asked.

'How the devil should I know? A man with a red beard, a robber I suppose; he ran up that street towards the Strand. He stabbed me in the arm, or I should have held him fast enough.'

'Was this poor chap a friend of yours?' the policeman asked, lifting Gerald's head tenderly and carefully.

'Yes, he was. Where shall we take him to?'

'Oh, Charing Cross Hospital, of course. I'll get a cab.'

By this time two or three other policemen had come up, and a little crowd of night-birds had gathered on the scene—men who had been sleeping on the Embankment, women who had been sleeping on the Embankment, children who had been sleeping on the Embankment. A cab was got, a four-wheeler, and Gerald, still quite insensible, was put into it, and Bostock, with the policeman accompanying, carried him to the Charing Cross Hospital.

There Gerald was taken in, and the house surgeon looked to him. He had had some heavy blows on the head, given apparently with some weapon like a short iron life-preserver.

'Look here,' Bostock said in a low voice, 'when I came to close quarters with the red-haired man, I heard something fall on the pavement before he pulled out the knife and

stabbed me. If we go back there at once, we are sure to find the thing, whatever it was; a life-preserver, most likely.' He spoke with all the eagerness of a man whose heart is set on bringing the assailant of his friend to justice.

'All right, Mr. Bostock,' the policeman said sympathetically. Bostock had at once given his name, occupation, and address. 'We'll go there in a moment. But hadn't you better get this gentleman to look to the hurt in your arm?'

'Oh, it's nothing at all,' Bostock said hastily.

The surgeon, however, examined the arm, and found that there was a pretty deep flesh wound—nothing to cause any alarm, but something to need looking after. The surgeon was somewhat impressed by Bostock's total self-forgetfulness. He dressed the wound for the time, and then Bostock and the policeman

went to the nearest police-station. On their way they searched the Embankment at the place where the attempt was made, and there, to be sure, they found lying on the pavement a small steel life-preserver, apparently of American make, which could have easily been carried up the sleeve. The policeman impounded this piece of material evidence and took it to the station. There Bostock told all his story.

It was even yet not long past midnight. Bostock thought the best thing he could do was to find out Rupert Granton and put on him the distressing duty of bearing this painful news to Lady Scardale and to Miss Locke. He knew that Granton frequented the Voyagers' Club, and had heard him say that he was one of its original members. He would try for him first there, he thought, and then at the worst he could ring at the door

of Claridge's Hotel and insist on seeing Mr. Granton. He was clear in his mind that Granton was the right person to carry the news. Bostock could not carry it himself, as things had turned out. He was anxious to make some little capital out of the heroic part of rescuer which he had played—and, if he could only impress Granton with a feeling of that part, then Granton might convey the same impression to Lady Scardale—and to Fidelia. Granton, then, was the person to be first approached and first impressed.

As good luck would have it, he found Granton still drinking midnight—and not much else, at the Voyagers' Club. Granton came out to him smoking a cigar. He was evidently surprised at seeing Bostock, but he soon repressed his surprise.

'I hope I have not disturbed you, Mr. Granton,' Bostock began.

'Nothing ever disturbs me,' Granton politely said. 'Won't you come in and have a brandy-and-soda and smoke a cigar?'

From the very first Granton had a vague dislike and distrust of Bostock. Bostock's eyes had been a constant puzzle to him. Where had he seen those eyes—and why had they so flashed and sparkled then and were so dull and expressionless now—and why did his memory always show them as in another sort of face? Why had Bostock, a master of cool fencing, made that awkward mistake about the foil the other day? All these questions put Granton upon his guard. Bostock might be as exemplary a citizen as he was a good fencer, but it was always well to be on one's guard. Granton had been in many places where one's life every other day depends on his capacity for being always on his guard and never being surprised at anything.

Therefore he now took Bostock composedly, and waited to hear what Mr. Bostock had to tell.

'Your friend, Mr. Aspen,' Bostock said, 'has just been attacked by an assassin on the Embankment.'

Then, for half a moment, Granton's composure gave way, and he looked really astonished.

'Attacked by an assassin—on the Embankment? Do you mean a rough—or a robber? Is he badly hurt?'

'I saw him removed to the Charing Cross Hospital—he *is* badly hurt—he was quite unconscious when I left him.'

'All right,' said Granton, composedly turning to the vestiary for his light overcoat. 'I'll go and see him. I know the house surgeon at the Charing Cross Hospital. He'll let me in, I am sure.'

'Don't you want to hear what has happened?' Bostock asked quietly.

'Well—I think you have told me—all you know. You think he was attacked by an assassin. Anyhow, he was attacked by somebody. Did you see the affair?'

Granton's perfect composure a little puzzled and vexed Professor Bostock.

'Yes, I saw it,' he said sullenly. 'You don't seem to think much about it.'

'My good Mr. Bostock, what is the use of thinking much about anything in this sort of world? The thing is to try and do something. Now I am going at once to see my friend Aspen, and to see if I can do anything for him. Then I shall set about finding out this mysterious assassin. You really think an assassin?'

Bostock told his story briefly and coldly, for he did not like Granton's manner, and did

not see much chance of being greatly glorified in Granton's account of the event to Lady Scardale—and to Fidelia.

'Oh—this red-bearded man again? The same man you and I saw on the night when Seth Chickering was murdered?'

'The same man.'

'Your star seems to lead you to those odd scenes, Mr. Bostock. I am glad you came in good time this evening. We were both of us a little late on the other occasion.'

'We were,' Bostock grimly observed. 'If I had not been behind Mr. Aspen he would not be alive just now.'

'Quite an interposition of Providence, Mr. Bostock,' Granton said gravely. 'But now—look here—have you any theory about all this?'

'I can't help having a theory. There is

some conspiracy against the heirs of that diamond mine property——'

'Oh—that is your theory?'

'Certainly it is.'

'Well—that has been mine this long time. I wonder if we work it out in quite the same way?'

'Isn't it getting late?' Bostock asked. 'Had you not better go and see after Mr. Aspen?'

'Of course, I'll go and see after him—but you know I can't do him the least good just at present. I am neither nurse nor doctor, and he will be well cared for at Charing Cross Hospital. But I am anxious, before seeing him, to get at your theory of this case.'

They were now standing on the threshold of the club. Various cabmen on the rank in front of the club were signalling and soliciting them.

'Well, you see,' Bostock said slowly, 'one man is missing—Ratt Gundy. Where is he, I want to know?'

'Yes, exactly,' Granton said, with perfectly unmoved countenance, 'where is he, I wonder? And where is the other fellow—what is his name?—Japhet Bland? Where is he—I want to know?' And he did then, in the language of Hamlet, rivet his eyes on the face of Bostock.

Bostock said, 'I know so little about the whole affair—I only talk of what I hear.'

'But your theory is that Ratt Gundy is instigating these murders and these attempts at murder?'

'If I can be said to have a theory—if I have any means to enable me to form any opinion at all—then I should say yes—that is my opinion.'

'Curious now,' Granton said. 'Here we

are, two reasonably intelligent men—and both outside the circle of this controversy—and with, I suppose, about the same or quite the same means of information, and we have come to quite different theories. We are both agreed that these murders and attempts at murder are the scheme of one brain. We are agreed about that—are we not, Mr. Bostock?'

'Yes,' Bostock said, with hesitation, 'I think we are agreed about that.'

'Oh—but come—we are positively agreed about that?'

'Very well—yes—I suppose we are.'

'Only you are of opinion that the instigating brain is in the skull of the missing Ratt Gundy?'

'Yes—that is my opinion,' Bostock said. He was beginning to feel uneasy and uncomfortable.

'Curious now, is it not?' Granton said meditatively. 'According to all my theories, the instigating brain is in the skull of the missing Japhet Bland. Well—I shall go and see poor Aspen now. I daresay, if Japhet Bland were to know of my theory, he might be inclined to follow me, or have me followed, along the Embankment some night. But it would not be of much use. I have been accustomed to take care of myself. I shall listen for suspicious footsteps behind me—and if any one comes in front of me I fancy I can take good care of myself. So can you, of course; and if your theory is right, and it is made known that you hold it, you may be in just the same danger from Ratt Gundy that I should be from Japhet Bland. It will be curious to see which of us comes out right in the end and which of us lives to tell

the tale. Good-night, Mr. Bostock; I am going to look after poor Aspen.'

'You will carry the news to Lady Scardale to-morrow morning?' Bostock asked.

Bostock, somehow, he could not tell why, felt bewildered, and in the Elizabethan sense 'overcrowed.' He had a vague, confusing impression that Granton knew more than he said, and had been too much for him. He felt as one groping in the dark, and vaguely conscious of some hostile force coming towards him.

'I'll tell Lady Scardale first thing in the morning,' Granton said. 'Good-night—have a cigar? No?'

'No, thanks,' Bostock said.

'Curious, too,' Granton observed gravely. 'Some men can live without cigars. I can't. I find the troubles of life too much. Other

people naturally don't, of course—their withers are unwrung.' Then he called a hansom.

Bostock walked away perplexed. He felt as if he had been fencing with an antagonist of untried power, and that although he had not been defeated, yet that he had felt opposed to him a wrist of steel which somehow foreboded coming defeat.

Granton drove to Charing Cross Hospital, rang the night-bell, and asked for the house surgeon, whom he had known in former days and who knew all about him and his family. He was admitted to see the patient.

'He will recover?' Granton asked eagerly.

'He will recover, I think,' the surgeon said, 'but he has had a bad knock or two on the head, and it's a queer case altogether.'

There was a nurse watching poor Gerald as he tossed his bandaged and blood-stained

head feverishly and fretfully from one side to the other.

'A little delirious,' the surgeon said; 'you must not try to talk to him.'

'I know,' Granton answered. 'I have been often in such a fix myself. There is nothing that I can do, I suppose?'

'Oh no, nothing whatever. We'll take all possible care of him.'

The surgeon presently left Granton to look after other duties. Granton and the nurse—a quiet, reserved, intelligent woman, whose face somehow won Granton's confidence and sympathy—stood by the bed.

Gerald up to this time was lying almost unconscious and perfectly silent. Suddenly he started and tried to rise. The nurse held him down with a firm, albeit very gentle touch.

'I want to tell you something,' he said, in

tones so natural that Granton fancied for the moment that he must have recognised him. Then there came a mere cry from the bed—a cry in one word.

'Fidelia!' was the cry.

Granton started. He drew nearer to the bed.

'Fidelia,' he rambled on, in a low, unearthly kind of voice, 'your father was not murdered; I know all about it, I do, indeed, but I can't tell you. I can't help you to find out anything about it. It is a secret, and the man is my friend and your friend, and I can't tell what he has told me; even for you, Fidelia! Oh, if you do love me, why should you wait—why should you make me wait—until you have found it out? Take my word, you had much better never find it out. Don't try to find it out, Fidelia, my love! Let it remain a secret; it would only shock you if you were to find it

out, and what good—what good—what good? If we love each other, and we do—we do, we do—you told me yourself, Fidelia, that you loved me that day—that day—that dear, divine day in Ranelagh Gardens. Where have those days gone? Why don't we walk in Ranelagh Gardens now? We never walk there now, and I don't seem able to walk. What is the matter with me? I think it is because I don't see you now, and you will insist that we must not marry until we find out about your father; and you must not find out anything about it—no, no, no—let it rest, Fidelia; let it rest, and whatever you do, don't tell Lady Scardale one single word; don't ask her to find it out. Oh, if she found out, it would kill her!'

'Has he raved like that before?' Granton asked, in a whispered tone, of the nurse, who had begun to smoothen the pillows and arrange

the bed-clothes with a gentle practised hand, in the evident hope of soothing the patient out of his wandering and distracted mood.

'Only within the last hour, sir,' she said, 'and it is all the same thing over and over again.'

'You have no idea what he is talking about?'

'No, sir,' she said quietly, 'we never concern ourselves with what our patients talk about.'

'I suppose it is a mere raving?' Granton asked tentatively.

'I suppose so, sir; patients constantly talk about things that never could have happened, and about persons that never could have lived.'

The sick man had now ceased to moan and talk, and was lying in a heavy sleep. Granton began to think he had better leave.

'Look here, nurse,' he said, 'you are a

sensible woman and a woman of the world, and you have the true feeling of your calling. What this poor fellow is saying now has a good deal of fact, and truth, and meaning in it.'

The nurse nodded her head, as if to say, 'I thought as much.'

'Of course you thought as much,' Granton said, quickly following or catching her unspoken meaning. 'Well, do you know Lady Scardale?'

'Yes, I have seen Lady Scardale often, and heard ever so much about her.'

'You heard him,' glancing at Gerald, 'mention her name?'

'Yes, sir, many times.'

'Do you know a young lady named Fidelia Locke?'

'The young lady who always goes about with Lady Scardale?'

'Yes. That young lady.'

'I have seen her two or three times.'

'You heard him mention her name?'

The nurse nodded.

'Well, these ladies—or Lady Scardale at all events—will very likely come to see Mr. Aspen. It would be of the highest importance that they or either of them should not hear such words as those he has lately been speaking. Will you take care that Lady Scardale is not allowed to see him—with Miss Locke or without her—at any time when he is likely to rave?'

'I shall take good care of that,' the nurse said sympathetically. 'I should have taken care of it, even if you had not mentioned anything about it. Only the nurse, and the doctor, and the clergyman ought to hear what man or woman says in delirium. I am sorry, sir, that you should have heard it—although, of course, you are his friend, and you'll not mind.'

'I am very glad I have heard it,' Granton said, 'for, because of my having heard it, I may be able to save much trouble to him, and to others too. Good-night, nurse.'

Granton hesitated and took out his purse in a doubtful sort of way, looking at the nurse.

'Would you be offended,' he asked, 'if I were to offer you some money? It would not be meant for offence. But perhaps you would not like to take it.'

'We are not allowed to take money,' she quietly replied.

'Well—look here,' he said. 'I must give you something. Take this for good luck.' He had a number of glittering baubles hanging at his watch-chain. He detached one. It was a tiny little golden locket, enclosing a symbol of a four-leaved shamrock traced in the smallest of diamonds.

'Wear that on your watch-chain, nurse—

I got it in a far-off country—the gold comes from there and the diamonds come from there —and the thing was made there. It was given me for good luck, but it never brought me any good luck until now, this very moment, when I stood with you here, and heard my poor friend moan out his troubles.'

The nurse hesitated :

'Was that good luck, sir?' she asked.

'It was, nurse—because I can set all the troubles right; and I am the only human being who can do it. So there—I pass on to you the luck found for the first time. You may take it—may you not? I shall be very sorry if you may not.'

'Thank you, sir—I shall tell the matron that you asked me to take it, and she will allow me. I shall wear it always and be grateful. Your name is Mr. Rupert Granton, I think?'

'Yes, nurse; I am Lady Scardale's brother-in-law. Good-night. I'll come again and see my friend.' Something occurred to him and he stopped.

'Do you find this a dull life, nurse?'

'Oh no, sir; I am so concerned about my patients; if I can help to pull a patient through, I do not care for anything else.'

'That is right,' Granton said; 'that is the true spirit of the soldier. I only wish we were all like that. Some of us are not, but we try to be sometimes.'

She thanked him for his present with a dignified kind of inborn modesty, making neither too much nor too little of the costly gift, and then Granton went on his way.

It was a thoughtful way for him. He was thinking much; he had, indeed, a good deal to think about. He had found out Aspen's trouble and Fidelia's, and he was the one man

who could put things right. But to put things right meant an absolute and a final banishment from civilisation. He had never a thought of hesitating.

'I came back to England,' he thought, 'only to try to do some good for this girl, at a time when I fancied somehow that she was a little thing in short frocks. I hadn't the remotest notion of how I could possibly be able to do any sort of good for her. She could not want any money, she would be rich enough, and there wouldn't be any likely way of my giving her any money and her taking it anyhow. Now, here, all of a sudden, I find the way to be of service to her and to her lover. I can settle the whole question for her about her father's death, and I can come to the relief of poor Aspen. True and gallant chap!—heart of oak! Fancy a London newspaper chap being like that! He would

positively have remained without his sweetheart rather than betray his comrade! Good fellow! can't imagine how they make that sort of fellow in London. I fancied that it took danger, and hard life, and struggle, and all that sort of thing, to make such plucky stuff. But it don't, clearly. I don't suppose Aspen, until this affair of the Embankment, was ever in the slightest danger of his life, except from a hansom cab at Hyde Park Corner, or something of that kind. Well, I have got to leave London and civilisation once more. Nobody will miss me much, except my sister-in-law, and even she won't miss me long. Nobody will know why I have gone. Yes! Fidelia must know; but there are other things that she will not know. She won't exactly know how I feel towards her—I shouldn't like it if she did. I suppose it would only worry her and pain her. Life is a sad

sort of thing. I suppose I should have done as well, after all, if I had stuck to society and conventionality, and followed the beaten ways, and married a nice little wife and settled down. But it's no use thinking of all that now. I had to dree my weird. I went my own way, and now I shall go my own way again. I stole like a shadow back into London civilisation, and now I shall steal like a shadow out of it again.'

CHAPTER XX

'I AM RATT GUNDY'

THE next morning Lady Scardale and Fidelia were walking in the garden of the College of Culture before the exercises of the day had yet set in. Fidelia had been unburdening her soul to her friend. Lady Scardale had listened, with a shade of disappointment faintly perceptible on her face. She was glad in her heart that Fidelia should be happy —or going to be happy—only she wished that her happiness could have come to her in a different form. She kissed the girl kindly.

'Dear Fidelia,' she said, 'you know that whatever makes you happy makes me happy just as well. "Thy own wish, wish I thee in

every place!" Only I am a little disappointed too.'

'Disappointed!' Fidelia asked with opened eyes of wonder. 'Disappointed!—with what?'

'Well, not with you, child, certainly—but about you. I did so hope that you could have seen your way to fall in love with my Rupert.'

'But, Lady Scardale, he never saw his way to fall in love with me.'

'Oh, I don't know—I have a strong belief that he was beginning to see his way fast enough—and then you would have made him so happy—and you could have held him to you, and made him so steady—and he would have quite redeemed all his past follies.'

'But, Lady Scardale, I don't feel that I have any mission to take charge of him, even if I were able to do it. And, you see, I am in love with Gerald—and he is in love with me—

and we can't help ourselves—and that makes all the difference. And you mustn't be angry with me or with him—above all, not with *him*.'

'No, indeed, I am not; and I shall love him for your sake; and he is ever so nice; and I am sure he will make you very happy.'

'Oh yes,' Fidelia murmured with a tranquil certainty which touched Lady Scardale.

'He has all the luck,' Lady Scardale said with a smile of resignation.

'No, indeed. I have all the luck,' Fidelia interposed.

'Are you to be long engaged?' Lady Scardale suddenly asked.

'Yes—I think so—a long time,' Fidelia replied with downcast eyes and overclouded brow.

'Why a long time, dearest? You are both going to be ever so rich with the beginning of next year.'

'It isn't that, Lady Scardale—it is because of my poor father's death.' She spoke firmly and without a note of a tear in her voice.

Lady Scardale looked at her curiously.

'Your father's death happened a good long time ago, Fidelia, and a girl is not expected to put off her marriage for a very long time even on account of the death of a parent. Of course, I did not suppose that you were going to be married the day after to-morrow, or next week, or anything of the kind. What I meant was, that I think a very long engagement might be a great mistake.'

'Why?' Fidelia asked composedly. 'Because he might get tired of me, or I get tired of him? But if that could be so, would it not be better we found it out before than after?'

'I was not thinking of that,' Lady Scardale said somewhat hastily, for it came back to her

memory that her own had been a very short engagement, and that not much good had come of its shortness; that if it had been much longer she might have known better, and things might have fared better with her. 'The truth is, dear, that is one of those wise sayings which we hear repeated so often that we begin to believe they are axioms of life, and repeat them like accepted gospel truth. But I do not see why yours should be a long engagement for all that; and if I were selfish, Fidelia, I should wish it to be ever so long in order that I might be the farther from losing you. This place will be changed for me when you are not here.'

'Oh! Lady Scardale—dearest friend,' Fidelia said, the tears which the allusion to her father's death had not brought into her eyes now starting swiftly there—'I shall be with you still and always—always—always.'

Lady Scardale pressed the girl's loving hand and remained silent for a moment.

'But,' Fidelia said abruptly, 'I didn't mean that it was because of my father's death—in that sense—that our engagement must be long. Not in that sense.'

'No? In what sense, dear?'

'I am afraid I can hardly explain it to you; even to *you*. You won't understand, perhaps, but I feel it so. I can't marry, I can't be happy, I can't take happiness if it were offered to me, until I find out the man who killed my father and bring him to justice.'

Lady Scardale drew away in surprise. She had not known that Fidelia's nature had that side to it.

'My dear,' she expostulated gently, 'what good could it possibly do to your father or yourself to bring this man, whoever he is, to justice, if you could bring him to justice?

Is it not likely that in that wild, unregulated community he was killed in an ordinary fight?'

'Oh, you too, Lady Scardale! That is what everybody says: Gerald, and your brother-in-law, and everybody.'

'Well, dear child, and are not Gerald and my brother-in-law likely to be right? More likely, at all events, than you, who know nothing about such places and such lives!'

'But I don't believe it, I can't believe it; my father never quarrelled; he was too gentle, he was too kind, he was too manly. I know he was murdered! I had a dream last night —only last night, dear Lady Scardale!—a horrid and a ghastly dream, about seeing a murder done, by one man creeping up behind another and striking him down with some heavy iron thing!'

'But was it your father you dreamed of?'

'I don't know; I could not see the face. I only saw the blow struck from behind.'

'I don't see much guidance in that dream, Fidelia,' Lady Scardale said with a compassionate smile.

'I am always dreaming about my father,' Fidelia piteously said.

'But you must think of someone else. You must think of your lover. Why should you keep him waiting for a discovery that may be impossible, or that, when it does come, may prove you to be utterly wrong? Ah, dear Fidelia, life is much too precarious for that kind of thing! If you love your lover, marry him as soon as ever you can, my dear. To-morrow some calamity may come—the bearer of bad news, sad news may be at the gate!'

As she spoke the words Rupert Granton appeared in the garden.

'Rupert at this hour!' Lady Scardale said, and then added hurriedly, 'I am sure my words are not ominous.'

But as Rupert came up there was an evident shadow on his face, and the hearts of the two women sank within them. Rupert, however, tried to make as light of things as possible.

'Now look here, girls,' he said—it was a way of his lately to address the two friends as 'girls'—'I want you to be very plucky just now, and to help to look after a poor fellow who is in some trouble, and not to make too much about it. It won't, I fancy, be a very bad business, after all.'

Fidelia turned deadly pale. She knew that something had happened to Gerald. Lady Scardale quickly said, all her courage coming back at the needed moment:

'Tell us the worst at once, Rupert dear.

All my life long I have hated to be prepared for anything.'

'Tell us the worst,' Fidelia echoed faintly.

'Well, the worst is this: Gerald Aspen has been badly hurt; and the best is, that I am sure he will recover.'

'Sure he will recover!' Fidelia said with a white scared face; 'sure he will recover! Then he is in danger?'

'Not now, I trust and firmly believe,' Granton said cheerily. 'He was attacked from behind on the Embankment last night; he was struck down and got some ugly knocks on the head, but he is sure to come all right again—and very soon.'

'Where is he?' both women asked at once.

'In the Charing Cross Hospital. I saw him there last night—or this morning.'

'What did he tell you about it?' Lady Scardale asked.

Granton hesitated.

'Well,' he said, 'the fact is, he did not tell me anything. It was just after he had been brought in, and he was a little delirious. That's all the better sign, they tell me.'

Nobody had told him any such thing; it was a pious fraud devised by him on the spur of the moment.

'Come, Fidelia,' Lady Scardale said, 'we'll go and see him.'

'Who struck him?' Fidelia asked.

'No one knows as yet. Very likely some Thames Embankment rough and robber.'

'It was not!' Fidelia exclaimed, 'and you don't think anything of the kind! Oh, I can see it in your face! It was an attempt at murder. The same hand that struck down that man Seth Chickering.'

'Well! if you will have it so,' Granton composedly answered, 'I think so too. I firmly believe that a network of murder is woven round us. I am perfectly determined that I shall not stop until I find out the whole truth.'

'I'll help you,' Fidelia cried with awakened energy and flashing eyes. 'I know that the same hand that killed Seth Chickering, and killed my father, is the hand that struck at Gerald Aspen.'

Granton smiled a melancholy and forlorn smile.

'Do you not believe it?' she asked impetuously.

'I believe,' he answered gravely, 'and I am convinced that the man who struck down Seth Chickering is the man who struck down poor Aspen. I shall find out that man.'

'Was it you, dear, who found Mr. Aspen on the Embankment?' Lady Scardale asked.

'No; Aspen was found by your friend Bostock.'

Fidelia suddenly drew back and put her hand to her forehead, as if she were half asleep and were trying to rub her eyes into complete wakefulness. No distinct suspicion crossed her mind, but still the vague threatening words of Bostock came back into her memory—the threat with which she had reproached him, and for which she had scouted him at the time—that it would harm others as well as her, if she were altogether to repel his advances. She remembered that, and she remembered also his melodramatic suggestions, that he was not altogether what he seemed to be. These thoughts filled her with perplexity and anxiety. She must tell Lady Scardale all that had happened; she

must tell her on the way, she thought. She became suddenly silent.

'Will you take us to the hospital, Rupert?' Lady Scardale asked.

'Yes, I'll take you there, and introduce you to the house-surgeon, a good friend of mine. If it isn't against the rules, I dare-say he will let you in; but it very likely is against the rules, and anyhow you couldn't do anything for poor Aspen. He will be well looked after, you may be quite sure.'

'Oh, we'll go,' Lady Scardale said.

Then a message was brought to Lady Scardale; the work of the day was setting in, and she had to go into the house.

'I shall be ready, Fidelia,' she said, 'in half an hour.'

'I shall be ready too,' Fidelia calmly said. The stress of the sudden news and the sudden

thoughts coming on her was forcing her into a kind of marble calmness.

Then Lady Scardale hastened along the garden paths and into the house, and Fidelia and Granton were left alone.

'I am glad my sister is gone,' Granton said. 'I want to talk to you about some serious things, Miss Locke.'

'No more bad news?' she asked with a tremor in her voice.

'Well—bad or good, it must be told. I know that these murders and attempts at murder are done with a purpose—and I am drawing a theory, slowly but surely, about them. Professor Bostock, who found poor Aspen last night, has a theory too.'

He saw that Fidelia started.

'What is his theory?' she faintly asked.

'His theory is that the murder of Seth Chickering and the attack on Aspen were set

on, if not committed, by the man called Ratt Gundy. Now that is not my theory. I know a little too much for that.'

'You have a theory?' she asked. She almost shrank from hearing the answer. Strange and horrible ideas had been creeping up in her own mind and bewildering her with a terrible sense of uncertainty. Uncertainty seemed, indeed, to have now taken her life under its control.

'I have formed a theory,' he said, 'and I propose to work it out—but I don't want to talk much about that just now—we have not time, and it can wait. What I particularly want to tell you cannot wait. I want to tell you of something I heard last night—from poor Aspen, while he was delirious. He talked about you—he raved about you—he thought he was talking to you. You know how he loves you.'

'Oh yes,' she said passionately. 'And he knows how I love him—everyone may know it who will.'

'I know it,' Granton said calmly. 'Well, what I want to tell you is that, whoever made the attempt on Aspen's life last night, it certainly was not Ratt Gundy.'

'Oh, but surely,' she said impatiently, 'you need not tell me that.'

'It will be told to you that it was Ratt Gundy, and some attempt might be made to get you to believe it.'

'How on earth could I believe it?' she asked impatiently. It almost seemed as if Granton were trifling with her feelings. 'How could I believe that when I know that the man with that name is dead?' she said. 'You told me yourself that Ratt Gundy was dead.'

'Yes, I did, and I was speaking the truth then, and almost literally. I had made up

my mind that Ratt Gundy should be buried for ever—never to appear again. I did not see any further use of him to me, or to you, or to anybody; and I thought the sooner the world was rid of him the better.'

'Then, is he living?'

'Yes, I have brought him to life, on your account.'

'Oh, on my account?' There was something wild about Granton's manner which almost frightened her, although she was not a girl whom it was easy to frighten.

'Yes, on your account. Do you know that I verily believe, if Ratt Gundy were really lying in the cold grave, he could be almost brought out of it to come and lend a helping hand to you?'

'Do I need a helping hand, Mr. Granton?—and how?—and if I do, how is this man to help me?'

'You do need a helping hand very badly, very sorely, and he is the one man who can give it to you. See here, Miss Locke, you are going to allow the happiness of two lives to be thrown away, and I am not going to stand it, if I can, and neither is Ratt Gundy—if *he* can.'

'Oh—this man Ratt Gundy—what has he to do with me? I almost hate to hear the mention of his name. I don't know why. You told me yourself that Ratt Gundy was not the name of the man who—who—oh, how terrible to have to speak of such things!—who murdered my father.'

'Fidelia, your father was not murdered—he was killed in what we rowdies of that day called a fair fight. The fight was forced on him and on the other man by a black-hearted scoundrel who has since suffered part, and only a very small part, of the punishment he

ought to have. I swear to you that there was no murder—unless to get up a deadly fight between two men who were not natural enemies be a murder—and then the murderer was Noah Bland, and he was lynched not long after. That murderer is out of your reach or mine.' There was a curious exaltation of manner about Granton which held Fidelia impressed, for all her impatience and her suffering. There was an absolute truth in his flashing eyes, in the sound of his voice, which carried with it to the listener an entire conviction. She listened awe-stricken to what was yet to come, for she knew that something decisive and final would have to be told and listened to.

'You believe me, Fidelia?' he said.

'Yes, I believe you.' She hardly noticed in her absorption that he had taken to calling her by her christian-name.

'I told you that the name of the man who killed your father was not Ratt Gundy.'

'You did.'

'I spoke the literal truth. The name—the real name of the man—the most unfortunate and deeply repentant man—who killed your father was not Ratt Gundy but Rupert Granton.'

'Merciful heavens!' she exclaimed; and the first thought that rushed into her mind was 'Lady Scardale's brother—the brother of my dearest friend and best benefactress—Rupert Granton killed my father!'

'Yes, you may well exclaim—you may well cover your face with your hands to shut out all sight of me. I wish to heaven it had been my good luck to be killed by him, or better still, by someone else, years and years ago! I have been lamenting that terrible day ever since. I have that dead face before me;

yes, I see you shudder at the thought. I came back to England for nothing but to find you out and try to do some good for you, unknown to you. I never would have allowed myself to return to civilisation but for that. I would have allowed my wretched memory to fade from my poor sister's mind; yes, I may call her my sister; she is the sister of my heart and of my soul. I would rather never let her touch my blood-stained hand, only for you—you—you!'

'Let me go now,' Fidelia said. 'Let there be peace between us, and let me go. I can bear no more.'

'Yet a little more,' he said eagerly; 'you must not refuse to hear me tell my tale, and then you are released and shall not see me ever again——'

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'let me not see you ever again. I will go away—I don't know or

care where. I cannot live with Lady Scardale any more, after this. I have lost her too, lost everything.'

'You shall not go, Fidelia. There shall be no need. I am disappearing again out of civilisation for ever. No power on earth shall drag me back to England. My sister-in-law need never know of this. She will only believe that her absurd brother-in-law has gone back to his rowdy life, and she will be sorry but she will not be much surprised; and she will have enough to occupy her in doing good, and she will not have time to think too much about him. Fidelia, there is no reason why my poor sister-in-law should ever know this tale.'

'Why did you tell it to me?'

'Because I saw you wasting your life and the life of my friend for nothing, and I could not bear it. Since I came to know you I

have come to know, too, that there might have been better things in life for me than knocking about the world with gamblers and cowboys and the scum of European armies. You made me feel this, although you never knew it or thought about it, I dare say. I have thought better of life since I came to know you, and that is why I have told you my tale.'

'Let me go now,' was all she could say.

'Just another moment. I am Ratt Gundy.'

'You Ratt Gundy?'

'That was the name I gave myself out there,' he jerked his head impatiently, 'out in that confounded place. I have given myself several names in life, and left a queer reputation for some of them. If anything of all this must reach my poor sister-in-law's ears, remember it was Ratt Gundy who did the deed. She must not know the truth. And

now—yes, I think that's all. I have one job of work to do before I leave England, and then I am off, and I shan't come back. I mean to track out the man who planned and carried out these attempts at murder; and I fancy I am on his traces already. I am one of the heirs, Fidelia, just as you are. Remember, I am the Ratt Gundy of the story, and think if I am the man who was likely to make a murderous attack on your lover!'

'I can't believe that you are Ratt Gundy,' she exclaimed.

'I am Ratt Gundy as sure as you are Fidelia Locke, and it was Ratt Gundy who killed your father; and I came back to England under the name of Ratt Gundy to try to make some amends to you for my fault and my crime, although, God knows, I was driven on to it, and it was not thought much of a crime out there.'

'Oh, don't talk like that,' she implored.

'All right, I'll not defend myself; think the worst of me that you can. Only, remember, Fidelia, that my sister-in-law must know nothing of all this; that you, and she, and I shall have to go together to the Charing Cross Hospital in a few minutes, and that, if you were to show the slightest doubt or ill feeling to me, it might bring thoughts into her mind that you and I must keep for ever out of it. You will think of her, Fidelia, will you not, and you will save her brother-in-law for her?'

'Oh yes,' Fidelia said, 'I will do that with all my heart and all my soul.'

'I will not ask you to forgive me,' he said. 'That would be too much. I only ask you to go on in my sister's presence as if nothing had happened. I would not ask you to take my blood-stained hand now, here—

we two alone. I do ask you to take it formally, when we are with my sister.'

There was a moment of silence and of repression. Then Fidelia spoke out firmly.

'I will take your hand now, this moment; now, and at all times. I do not blame you, or I forgive you, I don't know which, but I will take your hand.'

A tear started into the bold bright eyes of Rupert Granton, as he stretched out his hand and took hers in it. Then Lady Scardale returned.

'Now, Fidelia,' she said, 'go and get ready.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAN WITH THE RED BEARD

London was thrilled with a new sensation. The attempt on the Embankment came a little too late to get much chance of display in the morning papers of next day, but it floated the second editions, and positively flooded the evening journals. Another murder had been at least attempted in connection with the great diamond-mine property; another of the heirs had been found stricken down in his blood. Gerald had been carried to the Charing Cross Hospital, where he lay for long in uttermost peril of his life. Meanwhile the evidence about the attempt was singularly clear and

simple. Mr. Bostock—Professor Bostock—of Lady Scardale's Culture College, at Chelsea, was happily able to tell a good deal about it.

Mr. Bostock's story was that on the evening of the night when the attempt was made he had walked with Mr. Aspen, talking over various things; that they had crossed and recrossed Battersea Bridge, the Professor living on the southern side of that new structure, and that Mr. Bostock warned him to be on his guard, for he told him that he had seen a red-haired and a red-bearded man, very like the man he, Bostock, saw on the night of the murder of Seth Chickering, hanging about the gate of the Culture College. That Mr. Aspen, being a plucky and high-spirited young fellow, had only laughed at the threatened danger; that Bostock had asked to be allowed to see him home, and that Aspen would not hear of it.

That he, Bostock, nevertheless, did follow Aspen a long way on the Embankment, keeping at some distance behind him, so as not to be noticed. That, just as they got to a lonely part of the Embankment, he fancied he saw a solitary figure lying on a bench, but did not take much account of that, having his eyes and his mind fixed on the safe progress of Mr. Aspen. That Aspen stopped to light a cigar, and that then Bostock saw the man on the bench leap up and rush at him and strike him from behind, but could not see what he struck him with. That he, Bostock, ran at the man and shouted out to him that he had got him and would never let him go. That it was the same red-bearded man he had seen on the night of Chickering's murder. That Aspen fainted and fell on the ground; that he, Bostock, and the murderer had a struggle; that the assassin stabbed him

with a knife in the right forearm and forced him to let go his hold, and that he then ran up one of the streets leading to the Strand and disappeared.

'I am a pretty strong man,' Mr. Bostock said, 'but he was stronger than I, and after the wound I got I could not hold him.'

Mr. Bostock expressed his regret that he had not had any weapon with him, but he explained quite naturally that, although he made his living by the sword, it was not his way to carry weapons when walking the peaceful London streets; and that on this night in particular he had not seen or fancied he saw the red-bearded man until after he started from the Culture College in Chelsea, for a quiet walk with Gerald Aspen.

'If I had carried a weapon of any kind,' he added, with the solemn and grave assurance of a master of arms who knows himself,

'this calamity could not possibly have occurred.'

The professor himself had received a somewhat serious wound from a knife in the arm. But from the first it was seen that the wound was not one to bring death with it. The flying assassin evidently had not time to make more than a hasty and inconsiderate use of his weapon. Meanwhile he had gone, and no trace of him seemed likely to be discovered.

Then it became borne in upon all the public mind that there must be some binding thread of connecting purpose running through the terrible catalogue of deaths and attempts to bring about death which belonged to this story of the diamond mine. The sharers in that great success had bound themselves to have the money divided, within a given time, between the surviving owners of the property

and the persons whom any deceased owners of the property might have nominated as their heirs. But they had further bound themselves to the condition that, if any of the company should die without heirs, his property was to be divided among the other partners. Seth Chickering was killed the very first night of his arrival in London. He had no heirs. His money would on the first of the coming January be divided among the others, that is, the surviving heirs. It was not clear by the terms of the document whether any one of the heirs might himself appoint an heir to receive his share in the case of his sudden death. At all events, it was highly unlikely that a young man like Gerald Aspen would have thought of nominating an heir in the case of his death, to share in a property to which he had not yet himself succeeded. The inference from all this was that someone

who understood the whole business, and who was utterly unscrupulous as to means, had possessed himself with the horrible idea of increasing the share of the survivors by diminishing their number.

Leading articles were written in every paper every day to argue the question out, to start new theories and to discredit older ones. Professor Bostock was interviewed by various journalists. He gave his ideas with the utmost frankness. He had no suspicion of anyone, he said, but he could not think the red-haired man was anything more than an instrument in whatever nefarious conspiracy might be going on. He pointed out, as one who had read the whole story and knew many of those connected with it, that there was at least one conspicuous claimant now absent, and who had suddenly disappeared from London—Mr. Ratt Gundy. He had

heard that Mr. Gundy had gone back to South America, but in these days of steam and ocean-racing South America was not very far off. Anyhow, the news of this last attempt would soon get to South America, and Mr. Gundy would learn about the desperate attack made upon his friend Mr. Aspen, and then, no doubt, Mr. Gundy would have something to say. The 'Catapult' in especial shone in the fulness, the perspicuity, and what we may call the earnestness, of its reported interviews. Was there not, the young man of the 'Catapult' asked, another of the claimants who had never been heard of —one Mr. Japhet Bland? Did no suspicion rest on him? None whatever, so far as he had heard, Mr. Bostock was free to say. Had he formed a theory on that subject? Well, he was, except so far as fencing was concerned, a somewhat dull and slow man, whose

intellect and whose conjectures were not of great account, but if he were pressed he must say that he had formed a theory, perfectly worthless no doubt. Being pressed, the professor, after much depreciation of his own intelligence, yielded so far as to ask whether it was not possible that the missing Japhet Bland, whose father was one of the original owners, and who had been put to death by some of the rest, might have been made aware of some nefarious plot going on, and might have kept himself in obscurity and in darkness for the purpose of watching the development of the plot and exposing its machinations at the right time? The irrepressible interviewer asked whether the right time might not have come a little earlier, say just before the murder of Seth Chickering? Mr. Bostock said yes, very likely; of course, he did not profess to have studied the question

closely, he had so many other things to do, but still it was quite possible the watching man, if any such man there were, might not have got hold of the plot in time to prevent the murder of Seth Chickering.

All this mystery tended to make Mr. Bostock the hero of the hour. He had done the deed of a faithful friend in following Mr. Aspen home that night, and if Mr. Aspen were to live, his life would, undoubtedly, be owing to the daring intervention of Professor Bostock. Bostock's photograph at once became popular, and the renown of his skill as a fencer went over the land. The Culture College became through him far more famous than ever. Then his theory about the murders was eagerly taken up by all the papers, and certainly made good preparations for the emerging out of darkness, and on to the light and scene at an appropriate time, of

Japhet Bland. The public opinion of the hour was strongly inclined to make in advance a hero of Japhet Bland, and to look with keen suspicion on the vanished Ratt Gundy. The man who had voluntarily disappeared stood at a great present disadvantage when compared with the man who had voluntarily declined thus far to put in an appearance.

What about the red-haired and red-bearded man? The police made endless perquisition for any man of that description who could fairly come within the reach of suspicion. Red-haired and red-bearded men are common objects on every shore, but even in all the excitement the police could not venture to arrest in turn every red-haired and red-bearded man, and to try to make him amenable to the criminal laws of England. Some riverside folk did call attention to the fact that a man with unkempt red hair

and a red beard used sometimes to show himself in a strange, amphibious sort of life, above bridge at Battersea, but if any such man had ever been there, he was nowhere now to be seen. The earth and water have bubbles, and apparently he was of them.

After a while, Gerald began to get better, and he too was interviewed; and he certainly corroborated, as far as was within the power of his observation and his memory, the story told by Professor Bostock. Gerald was quite clear in his mind that the man he turned round to grapple with had a red beard. He could not tell much more, but that much at least he could tell. He did not know the face, he was not even certain that he could identify the man if he were to see him again, but he was quite clear about the man having a red beard. Also, he was quite clear about having heard Professor Bostock's voice crying out to the assassin,

that he should not escape this time, and he was equally positive as to the fact that Bostock's intervention had saved his life. He had not the least idea, he said, that Bostock was following him ; he did not believe at the time he was threatened by the slightest danger, but in the very instant of his hearing Bostock's voice his failing mind grasped a perception of Bostock's futile warning, and he knew that his brave friend had followed him and had saved him. Gerald was a little profuse in his expressions of admiration for Professor Bostock. In truth, he was thinking nearly all the time that Bostock had saved him for Fidelia ; that only for Bostock he would have been killed, and Fidelia would be sorry ; and he looked upon Bostock as having saved Fidelia and himself. A man to whom illness of any kind is new gets easily into an odd, contemplative, aloof sort of way of looking at events, and scenes, and possi-

bilities. Gerald could now contemplate the possibility of his having been actually killed on the Embankment, and into what did the whole possibility resolve itself? Into nothing that directly concerned him. He did not form any picture of his own early grave in some suburban burial-place; of his own career suddenly and cruelly cut short; of his sudden fall from realised love and promised wealth down into dusty death; all this never presented itself to his mind. He only thought of Fidelia mourning for her murdered lover, and tears came into his own eyes at the thought of tears in hers. 'Veil not the heaven of those bright eyes in tears,' sings the sad lover in 'Don Quixote.' Poor Gerald could not bear the very thought of Fidelia's veiling the heaven of her bright eyes in tears, even though the tears were to be shed for him. Of course, Gerald was asked if he had a theory about the attempt on the Embank-

ment. Did he think it had any connection with the successful attempt on the life of Seth Chickering? Well, yes, a theory of the kind had certainly been forcing itself upon him. At first he was not inclined to believe that there could be much in it, although, of course, he had often put to himself the question—Who was the man interested in getting rid of Seth Chickering? And the fact that Seth was one of the few owners of the mine who had no heir did suggest a remote possibility of some selfish reason for the murder.

But when it became clear that the man with the red beard, who had undoubtedly been an instrument in the murder of Seth Chickering, had been seen by Professor Bostock outside the gate of the Culture College, and had been seen by himself, Gerald, in his struggle for life on the Embankment, and had been positively identified by Professor Bostock as the assailant in that struggle, then it became

impossible to doubt the existence of a murderous plot in which the man with the red beard was probably only an instrument. Had Mr. Aspen ever heard of any of the claimants of the property having a red beard? No, he had never heard anything of the kind; but then he had never heard much about the personal appearance of any of the claimants, living or dead, whom he did not himself personally know.

Did he know anything about the man called Ratt Gundy? Oh yes—and here Gerald became a little impatient—he knew Ratt Gundy; and the people were simply bewildering themselves who let it get into their heads that Ratt Gundy had anything to do with these crimes. But where was Ratt Gundy now? On that point Gerald could give no information. The whole question narrowed itself down to the fact that the man with the red beard who had been found near

the body of Seth Chickering had made a murderous attack on Gerald Aspen, and that Gerald Aspen and Seth Chickering were alike heirs to the property in the diamond mine.

Certainly it was not unnatural that popular suspicion should turn upon the missing Ratt Gundy. Every one remembered how, after all, it was he who was found by the police close to Seth Chickering's dead body. On the other hand, it was certain that the man with the red beard was not Ratt Gundy himself. According to Professor Bostock's evidence at the inquest, he had himself encountered the man with the red beard at a moment when Ratt Gundy must necessarily have been talking with the police in the court running out of St. James's Street. The one final question then was, Who is the man with the red beard?

We have been saying that Professor Bostock became the hero of the hour. So he was, in a certain sense. But only in the sense of the hero whose heroism one admires; not at all in the sense of the hero who exacts and absorbs our interest. In that sense the hero of the hour was undoubtedly the man with the red beard. The newspapers were full of leading articles and correspondence about him. An immense variety of theories were set afloat like balloons across the sky of public controversy. One hasty suggestion was that he was nothing but a madman with a passion for murder. But this idea was soon knocked to pieces by the obvious comment that there was a little too much method in that sort of madness, and that a lunatic who never wreaked his fury on anyone except the claimants of a vast property might just as well be sane and do his murders with the purpose of other

murderers. It was taken for granted, too, that the murderer was not himself any one of the co-heirs. He certainly was not Captain Raven; he certainly was not Gerald Aspen; he certainly was not Ratt Gundy, whom so many people had seen at the time of the inquest. To be sure, there remained the other co-heir, Japhet Bland, who had not yet appeared to claim his share of the inheritance; but nothing could be more utterly preposterous than to suppose that a man who doubtless intended to present himself and make a claim to his share in that vast fortune would, in the meantime, go about murdering all his co-heirs, and allowing himself to be seen and identified by two such totally different observers as Ratt Gundy and Professor Bostock. The interest of expectancy was added to the interest of conjecture. Who is the man who has done all this? is undoubtedly a very interesting

question; but it is not, after all, quite so interesting as the question, What will he do next? Will he stop short at his last abortive attempt? Surely not—that would be too illogical and imperfect; it would make the whole business seem unmeaning and unreal A man might as well never have done a murder at all who could break off from his purpose in that incomplete fashion. Therefore the question for the public became, Whom will he attack next?

So the one terrible figure of the hour, the one object of morbid curiosity and affrighted interest, was the man with the red beard. Disobedient children were frightened into quiescence and order by being threatened with the man with the red beard. There were topical songs about him at the music-halls. There were encore verses introduced about him in the theatrical burlesques. There was a flesh-creeping domestic melodrama made

about him and played in one of the theatres at the East End. Huge lines on the bills of the evening papers announced the reported or rumoured—certainly the word 'reported' or 'rumoured' being generally in small letters—'Capture of the man with the red beard.' Vulgar and brutal perpetrators of practical jokes tried to scare women and children in by-streets of evenings by announcing themselves in loud voices as the man with the red beard. Every man whom Nature had lavishly adorned with a red beard, and who did not feel inclined to sacrifice that ornament to what might be called a popular panic, was liable to find himself regarded very often as an unwelcome intruder into omnibus or underground railway. Such an afflicted mortal getting into any public conveyance was very likely to hear a young fellow whisper facetiously to his sweetheart: 'The man with the red beard.' Some timorous creatures, under the impelling in-

fluence of their wives, who said they really could not otherwise go about with them any more, went so far as to have the red beard greatly docked, and reduced to comparatively insignificant proportions. But even this timid policy, this policy of compromise and of time-serving, was not always rewarded by success. Sometimes the half-shorn man getting into an omnibus or an underground train heard a droll person whisper to some one near him—a girl most likely: 'Look here, 'e 'as shaved 'is beard.'

Yes, the man with the red beard was for the time the man about whom everyone talked, about whom everyone in the paragraphing line wrote paragraphs, and everyone in the topical song line composed and sang songs. Some sceptics, it should be mentioned, still refused to believe that there was any such person in existence.

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN FROM THE SEA

THE days went on and healed Gerald's hurt and abated public interest in the event. On one of these days Mr. Bostock, passing along the Queen's Road, paused for a moment hesitatingly at Mrs. Borringer's shop. Then he opened the door and went in.

Inside the shop he stood and looked curiously about him. His lustreless black eyes ranged rapidly over the long rows of shelves laden with brown-paper packages, over the innumerable little drawers in which strange seeds and wholesome roots lay hidden. A faintly pungent, aromatic odour hung over the

place and his nostrils dilated under the balsamic influences.

Lisbeth, Mrs. Borringer's ancient maid, sat behind the counter, solemnly knitting. As Bostock came in she glanced up at him keenly through her spectacles. She knew him quite well by sight.

'What might you be pleased to want, Mr. Bostock?' she asked with old-fashioned gravity and with a strong Surrey accent.

Bostock, still taking in every detail of the place, asked if Mrs. Borringer was in. If she was he wanted to see her—to speak with her for a few minutes if she could spare the time.

Lisbeth rose, sheathing her needles in the knitting, and moved to the back of the shop, where the door was which led to the dwelling part of the house. She pushed it open just enough to make room for her, and passing

through closed it behind her. Bostock was left alone.

As soon as the door closed behind Lisbeth Bostock began to move cautiously about the little shop, opening this drawer, and that drawer, and peering curiously into them, lifting up bundle after bundle from the shelves and scrutinising the neatly-written labels, penned in Mrs. Borringer's fine sloping hand, which informed him of the names of their contents. In a large box divided into many compartments, that occupied a part of the long counter, there were a great quantity of packages of seeds. He lifted out package after package and read their names, for they, too, were neatly labelled. As he read, it did not seem from the expression of his face as if the reading afforded him any special degree of information.

There was a book on the counter also—a

thick, ancient volume, a curious old herbal of the seventeenth century, with a number of quaint plates of plants quaintly described. Bostock took the book up and opened it. He was turning over its leaves, and pausing to look at each plate in its turn, when Mrs. Borringer came into the shop.

Mrs. Borringer's face was not a smiling face just then. Mrs. Borringer did not much like Mr. Bostock. She could not tell exactly why she did not like him. She had heard nothing against him ; she knew nothing against him ; he came very little into her life ; there certainly was no valid reason for her dislike of him. But the fact of her dislike was a perfectly clear fact to her, and she did not try to argue herself out of it just because it might seem to be a little unreasonable. 'It is an instinct,' she said to herself, 'and instincts of that sort are as often right as wrong, and even more often.

If you don't like a person you don't like that person, and there is no use in arguing about it.' So Mrs. Borringer, being a practical woman, made no particular effort to combat her dislike for Mr. Bostock, though the dislike was not keen enough to cause her any appreciable worry even when Mr. Bostock was present, and was not felt at all in his absence.

Bostock put the book down on the counter and saluted Mrs. Borringer. Mrs. Borringer nodded grimly and took Lisbeth's seat behind the counter. Bostock apologised for looking at the book, but excused himself on the ground that he found it so interesting.

'You must know a great many very interesting things,' Bostock said, looking steadily at Mrs. Borringer with the same curious absence of expression which his masklike face habitually wore. 'It must be a great

privilege to you to feel that you have the power to do so much good in the world.'

'Everybody ought to do some good in the world,' said Mrs. Borringer sententiously. 'That's what we are sent here for, I suppose.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' Bostock assented, waving his arm as if he were about to salute in fencing. 'I thoroughly agree with you, Mrs. Borringer, thoroughly. It is often a cause of great regret to me that in my younger days I did not devote myself to the study of medicine. I think now that I should have found it more useful than fencing—more useful to myself and to others.'

'Well, if you will excuse my saying so,' said Mrs. Borringer, 'I really don't quite see what use in particular fencing is to anyone.'

'Oh, don't you?' Bostock began with

a tone of pained surprise in his voice, but Mrs. Borringer waved him down and went on.

'I know, of course, that Lady Scardale thinks a lot of it, and it may be a fine exercise, I dare say; but it's no finer exercise than making hay, which I did when I was a girl, and I'm a stronger woman now for all my fifty years than that girl of mine whom you teach fencing to, Mr. Bostock.'

'And very well she fences too; very well, indeed,' Bostock interpolated.

'That's neither here nor there,' said Mrs. Borringer. 'What I want to know is, what's the good of teaching a parcel of girls, or a parcel of men either for that matter, how to handle a bit of a sword that nobody ever uses?'

'On the Continent, my dear Mrs. Borringer,' Bostock suggested.

'Oh, on the Continent,' answered Mrs.

Borringer with deep disdain; 'on the Continent men may make monkeys of themselves with skewers if they like, but here, in England, we don't hold with such notions, and if we don't hold with them what's the good of playing at holding with them? that's what I ask.'

And Mrs. Borringer glared at Mr. Bostock with an air of good-humoured defiance, as if she felt convinced that she had completely annihilated him.

Bostock smiled a deprecatory smile, and waved his hand again as if he were physically parrying Mrs. Borringer's attack.

'Well, well,' he said, 'I frankly admit that you are of more use to the world than I am. Here you sit surrounded by herbs that are only harmless and healing——'

Mrs. Borringer interrupted him.

'That depends, Mr. Bostock—that depends. Some of these herbs of mine are the deadliest

things under heaven, if they be rashly or wrongfully used.'

'Is that so?' Mr. Bostock asked with much surprise. 'How very curious! how very interesting! Surely there is nothing in all this array of innocent packages which could possibly do any harm to anything?'

Mrs. Borringer smiled grimly at the fencing-master's ignorance.

'Why, there's enough in this shop to kill an army of elephants if you wanted to.'

She nodded at Mr. Bostock as she spoke, emphatically.

Mr. Bostock listened with quiet attention, and he smiled slightly as he said, 'Luckily nobody does want to kill off an army of elephants or even a single elephant; but, surely, Mrs. Borringer, an elephant would come to no harm if he swallowed the whole contents of your shop. They might do him good—I

don't deny that—but harm, ah! surely no, not harm.'

Mrs. Borringer began to feel irritated by his urbane incredulity. It seemed to cast a slight upon the potency of the herbs she loved so well and believed in so profoundly.

'I should be sorry for any elephant who ate the contents of this drawer,' she said, turning slightly round and touching one of a little row of drawers that ran along the wall behind her.

Bostock leaned forward and read the inscription on the drawer, '*Verat. Alb.*'

'What does that mean, Mrs. Borringer?'

'That's short for *Veratrum Album*, which is the Latin name of the White Hellebore,' Mrs. Borringer answered. 'Those are dried roots of it in there. Either infusion or powder from those dried roots would kill an elephant if you gave him enough of it.'

'Well,' said Mr. Bostock good-humouredly, 'live and learn, indeed. What a pleasure it must be to you to know so many things, Mrs. Borringer! I wish I had more general knowledge than I have. Outside fencing, I don't know much. Of course, I pick up a little knowledge here and there knocking about the world, but not much.'

Mrs. Borringer did not like Mr. Bostock, but she was flattered none the less by his tribute to her learning. After all, she really was very well read in the law of herbs, and would have thought Friar Lawrence in 'Romeo and Juliet' the most agreeable companion in the world. So she smiled, and was about to say something when the street door behind Bostock opened and Captain Raven entered the shop. He shook hands warmly with Mrs. Borringer, who at once rose to welcome him. Glancing round the shop, Raven recognised Bostock and

nodded affably to him. Raven was always affable with everyone on principle. He said that it made the machinery of life move much more smoothly.

'Good day, Mrs. Borringer,' he said. 'I have come over especially to see you, so I hope you will give me some tea.'

'Delighted, Captain,' said Mrs. Borringer. 'Will you go upstairs? I shall be with you in a few minutes.'

Captain Raven nodded. Bostock watched him with something like interest in his eyes. Everyone who knew anything of Chelsea, or at least of the little circle in Chelsea which was associated with the Culture College, knew that Captain Raven had a very great admiration for Miss Lydia Borringer.

People who did not know Captain Raven, people who did not know Mrs. Borringer, wondered at the intimacy between Lord

Wallington's son and the herbalist's daughter. Not that there was anything really surprising in it. The stout yeoman stock of which Mrs. Borringer came had always been more or less intimately associated with the house of Raven. The farmers of Gamellgarth and the lords of Wallington had been friends for generations. Lord Wallington, the Captain's father, as we have seen, gave away Susan Gamell upon the occasion of her marriage with Andrew Borringer, his lordship being then himself but newly married for the second time.

In their boyhood the young Ravens were always in and out of the garth, and John Raven, the scapegrace, had always been very fond of baby Lydia. He was very fond of Lydia now that Lydia was no longer a baby, and Mrs. Borringer knew that that was the best thing about him. She knew what nobody else knew—that Raven had begged the girl to

marry him. In all his queer, drifting, rather disreputable life, Raven had never met anyone whom he cared for as he cared for Lydia.

Bostock knew something of all this from popular report, from things that were said at the Culture College, from the bearing of Lydia, from the bearing of Captain Raven. He knew also that while Lord Wallington would hardly be likely to approve of the match, Lord Wallington's approval or disapproval was a matter of the most serene indifference to Captain Jackdaw. The Wallingtons had never loved each other much, and the fact that Lord Wallington disliked any particular course of action was generally sufficient reason for John Raven to take just that course.

Bostock knew, too, through the papers, that the position of Captain Raven had greatly altered. He had been but a penniless

younger son, living as best he could by his wits, glad enough to be the secretary of the Voyagers' Club. Now, through the news made public by the murder of Seth Chickering, his position was entirely altered. By the beginning of the next year he would be a rich man, an exceedingly rich man. The detrimental of yesterday was the desirable match of to-morrow. Bostock knew that pressure would be brought to bear upon Captain Raven; perhaps it was a wonder whether Raven's fidelity would stand the test of his sudden wealth, which made Bostock eye him with such a patient curiosity.

But Raven did not notice that Bostock was watching him; had no idea of any thoughts that might be passing through Bostock's mind. It would not have occurred to Raven that any thoughts of Bostock's could possibly affect him in any way.

'All right,' said Raven. 'I'll go up. Shall you be coming up presently?'

'Certainly,' said Mrs. Borringer. 'I shall be coming up directly.'

This was a decided hint to Bostock, but it had no perceptible effect upon him, for he still sat there motionless, looking at Raven.

Raven opened the door leading into the private rooms of the house, but as he turned the handle he looked back.

'I've been having one of those headaches again,' he said, with a laugh that was partly apologetic.

Mrs. Borringer looked disapproval and spoke it.

'You young men,' she said, 'you young men, you are all alike.'

'No, indeed,' Raven protested eagerly, and he glanced civilly at Bostock, as if willing to include him in the conversation as he was

present, 'we are not all alike; are we, Mr. Bostock?'

'I really don't know,' Bostock answered gravely. 'I know so little of young men about town.'

'No, really, Mrs. Borringer,' Raven went on, 'but I was a bit late the other night. A sort of supper I had to give to fellows who heard the news—about the money, you know—and who were pleased about it, or who said they were pleased about it, which comes to much the same thing in London life; and we did keep it up a little—oh, the mildest of rackets, but still a bit of a beastly headache the next morning.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Borringer, 'what do you want me to do?'

Raven laughed. 'You know; can't you fix me up something as you did before, you know? I don't believe in doctors not a cent;

but you know all about these sort of things, and might give me a powder or a draught or something that would fix me up to rights.'

Mrs. Borringer's stern expression relaxed, as it always did after John Raven had talked to her.

'Very well,' she said, 'I'll see what can be done. Run upstairs, and I'll find something for you.'

Raven laughed again, nodded good-humouredly to Bostock and passed out of the shop into the 'family mansion,' as he called the rest of the building. When the door closed upon him Mrs. Borringer again turned to Bostock.

'By the way, Mr. Bostock,' she said, 'you haven't yet told me what you want of me.'

'I beg your pardon,' Bostock replied. 'I was so interested in your conversation that I let my purpose slip for the moment. Well,

I came on something of the same errand as Captain Raven.'

Mrs. Borringer glanced up at him in some surprise. 'Do you suffer from headaches much? Do you "keep it up," as he calls it?'

Bostock shook his head. 'No, indeed, that is not at all my line. Where would my wrist and eye be for fencing in the morning if I kept it up at night? No, no, Mrs. Borringer, it's not that.' He paused again, paused for such a decided interval that Mrs. Borringer found herself compelled to jog his memory by inquiring somewhat sharply:

'What is it, then?'

'Well, the fact is,' said Bostock, 'that of late I have been suffering a great deal from sleeplessness. It's not pleasant, Mrs. Borringer, to lie awake at night, hour after hour, hearing the clock strike again and again.'

'No, it's not at all pleasant,' Mrs. Borringer agreed.

'I've been like that lately,' Bostock continued. 'Unable to sleep. Lying awake all night or nearly all night and seeing things, faces, and shapes coming out of the darkness.'

'Dear me, that's very unpleasant,' Mrs. Borringer said.

While she had been listening to Bostock she had been mixing one or two powders together from different receptacles, powders which she carefully weighed and proportioned before she mixed them. She put them into a little square of white paper, folded the square of white paper up, put it into an envelope and took up a pen.

'That is very unpleasant indeed,' she went on as she began to write. 'How long has this been going on?'

Bostock, watching her, could easily read what she was writing. She wrote the name of Captain Raven and after it the words, 'To be taken in a wineglass of wine or water, during dinner.'

'For some little time,' Bostock answered; 'I suppose I am out of sorts—nerves a little upset or something. I am like Captain Raven, I am not a doctor's man. But Lady Scardale spoke so warmly about your skill that I thought perhaps you might be able to do something for me.'

Mrs. Borringer did not like Mr. Bostock, but she had a professional sympathy for all persons requiring medical aid and a natural sympathy for all persons in trouble. Moreover, for human nature at its best is weak, she was always flattered at being appealed to for the aid of those healing herbs in which she so devoutly believed.

'Well,' she said, 'I daresay I could mix you something that would certainly soothe you and certainly do you no harm.'

'It would be very kind of you,' Bostock murmured.

'Not at all, not at all,' said Mrs. Borringer. 'If you'll wait a moment I'll just go upstairs and refer to my big book.'

This big book was a huge manuscript volume in which Mrs. Borringer entered methodically the sum of all her knowledge. It was really a very remarkable storehouse of information.

'I am in no hurry,' said Bostock politely. 'I will wait if you will allow.'

'I shan't be five minutes,' Mrs. Borringer answered, and she hurried out of the room and up the stairs. She was gone more than five minutes, however, but when she came back Bostock was still sitting there, slowly

turning over the leaves of the old herbal and studying the pictures with the greatest care.

Mrs. Borringer handed Bostock a small package.

'If you take one of those powders in water just before going to bed, I think you will find that it has a soothing effect,' she said.

Bostock thanked her. He got up, put the package into the breast-pocket of his frock-coat, shook hands with Mrs. Borringer, and passed out of the shop. He must have been very anxious for a sleeping draught, for there was an unwonted look of pleasure in his face as he stepped into the street. He turned to his left and walked a little way, thoughtfully. At the corner of the street there was a public-house, and against the door of the public-house a man was leaning.

The man was dressed in a seafaring

fashion, and looked like a sailor. The skin of his hands was very brown and so was the skin of his face, though that was cast into deep shadow by the hat which was tilted forward over his eyes.

Bostock did not notice the man. He was too much occupied with his own thoughts, which appeared to be agreeable. But the man noticed Bostock carefully. Under the brim of the tilted hat a pair of keen brown eyes scrutinised his face, his figure, his bearing. The keen brown eyes followed him as he walked slowly down along by the pleasant hospital gardens, filled just then with young men playing cricket. So long as Bostock was in sight the keen brown eyes followed him ; when he was out of sight the seafaring man shook himself free from the doorpost, against which he was resting, and turning walked back in the direction

from which Bostock had just come. He walked very slowly, so that it took him some seconds to reach the door of the herbalist's shop. During those few seconds, and while making those few paces, he was evidently thinking profoundly over some problem which puzzled him considerably. His hat, which was tilted back, now revealed a face browned and bronzed to a deep rich copper colour by long exposure to wild winds, by long soaking in tropic suns. He was a man of middle height, sparely but very strongly made, a man evidently of great strength, a man who could use every ounce of strength to its best possible advantage. It was not a handsome face, but it was a very manly face, and its fifty years were not inscribed in deep furrows on its surface.

At the door of the herbalist's shop he paused and looked in. The door was a half-

glass door and the sailor could see inside. Mrs. Borringer was still in the shop. She was moving about, putting one thing or another into order. The sailor turned the handle, pushed the door open, and entered the shop. At the sound of the opening door Mrs. Borringer turned round sharply, but the moment that she saw who the intruder was her features relaxed into a delighted smile. She came forward with both hands extended, took both the brown hands of the man in hers, and said:

'Welcome, Hiram, welcome! When did you come back?'

CHAPTER XXIII

HIRAM

Captain Raven had been going through a somewhat curious experience. He had been urging a girl who had cared for him when he was poor that it was still her duty to go on caring for him now that he was rich, or, to speak more literally, now that he had every prospect of being rich. Lydia Borringer was very much in love with Captain Raven. The baby-girl had regarded the handsome, dashing stripling as a sort of demi-god, and when after an interval of years the handsome stripling again came in her way, this time as a retired officer, who had seen many things and lived many lives, the woman gave the man the

admiration which the girl had given to the boy.

But Lydia's love for Jack Raven was neither unreasonable nor unreasoning. She was naturally a very clever girl; thanks to her mother's care and Lady Scardale's College, she was a very well-educated girl, and in everything but birth, in beauty and in breeding, she was more than worthy of an alliance with the noble house of Wallington. Raven had promptly fallen in love with her—fallen really, seriously, and sincerely in love with her. He told her so after a while, told her what manner of man he had been, what manner of man he hoped to be, and would try to be if she would only help him by becoming his wife. He suggested going to America and starting fair there. Lydia did not decide as to the American scheme, but she decided that she loved Jack Raven and that she would be his wife. Mrs. Bor-

ringer, on being told of the scheme, approved, upon due reflection, of the marriage. She knew that in the eyes of the world her daughter was not a match for John Raven, but she knew also that Raven and his family had little to say to each other, and she knew that Jack Raven had a good heart for all his waywardness. She had no great objection even to the American scheme, if it were at all advisable. One part of the world was much the same as another, she said, a saying she had learned from Hiram.

And so in a tacit manner Raven's engagement to Lydia was agreed upon. Nothing was said publicly. Mrs. Borringer insisted that nothing must be regarded as settled until Lydia was eighteen years old, which she would be in the end of the year. But Raven was allowed to come and see Lydia occasionally, and he was very happy. Lydia, too, was

happy. She had all the calm and strength of her mother's character with a beauty of face and form such as Susan Gamell had never boasted. It was a beauty of the dark type of that almost Spanish strain which is sometimes found in parts of England. It was said that a Borringer long back had married a gipsy woman, and it seemed as if some of the characteristics of the gipsy had come out in Lydia. Her deep dark eyes had read her lover's character to the core, and had assured her that, however wild and wayward he might have been, he was to be relied upon when he told her that he loved her. She was conscious, dimly, that she was in many ways superior as a woman to what he was as a man. She was educated, where he was dreadfully ill-educated; she had powers of reasoning, powers of thought, which destiny had wholly denied to Captain Jackdaw. But

she loved him, and she knew that she could trust him, and that was enough for her

When the news of the murder of Seth Chickering came, and all the revelations that lay in the pocket-book, Lydia felt a pang. When Raven came over, wild with delight to tell her the good news, he found that the news did not by any means exhilarate her. She pointed out to him in their first interview after the event, with the sweet gravity which was one of her greatest charms, that this unexpected fortune had altogether altered the position of things. It was all very well for Raven to marry Lydia Borringer when Raven was a hard-up man working for his living and Lydia was a girl with a little money of her own, who would make an excellent wife—she admitted so much—for a working man, but it was very different now that her lover was about to become a very wealthy man, able to

return to the great world which he had so cheerfully discarded, able to play his part in the great game of the world with more opportunities than a Wallington ever had before.

Raven thanked her for her thoughtfulness, but absolutely declined to entertain her suggestion.

'My dear girl,' he said, 'I was in love with you when I hadn't a penny and you were good enough to say that you cared for me. It wouldn't be at all the square game to go back upon me now, just because I happen to have come in for a small slice of luck.' And when Lydia still persisted he said at last:

'Look here; do you mean that you don't love me, after all? If you really mean that, and will say it honestly, why, of course, I shan't worry you any more. But if it's

simply this blessed "oof" that lies between us, I solemnly swear that if you mean that, I shall chuck the whole lot away—give it to some blessed society or other.'

And as Lydia could not honestly say that she did not love John Raven, and as John Raven obviously meant what he said, she gave way very gladly, and things went on as they had been going on before.

On this particular day Raven was feeling especially happy. While Mrs. Borringer had been occupied below stairs with Bostock he had been talking eagerly to Lydia of all the wonderful things that they were to do when they were married. Lydia had never travelled, and John Raven, as became the secretary and organiser of the Voyagers' Club, had travelled a good deal, and he liked immensely to describe famous foreign places to Lydia, and to picture to himself the pleasure

he would have in showing them to the girl.

She listened to him with the attention that Desdemona accorded to Othello, and between them they enjoyed their visionary wanderings immensely.

'By Jove, Lydia,' Raven was saying, at the close of some glowing description of the beauty of Cairo, 'I didn't think there was much chance of you and me seeing Cairo together. But now, thank goodness, we can see it and any other place we like on the surface of the little old world, and see it in style too. Good business!'

Raven leaned back and smiled at Lydia, who smiled back at him. Suddenly Raven's face grew grave. He leaned forward again, and said slowly: 'By Jove, I'm a tremendously lucky fellow! I wonder if anyone is envying me my luck very badly.'

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Borringer came in. She was followed by a bright-eyed, brown-skinned man in a sea faring garb at the sight of whom Lydia jumped up from her chair and flung her arms round the new-comer's neck, crying, 'Oh, Uncle Hiram!'

Raven had never seen Hiram Borringer before, though he had heard a great deal about him from mother and daughter. He had been very young when Hiram went to sea, and had not come across him during his last return to England after the Arctic exploration. He was now introduced to the famous wanderer, who shook his hand very warmly.

'You are a fortunate man, sir,' said Hiram.

'I am, indeed,' Captain Raven replied. 'There's no one in the world like Lydia.'

'You are right there,' said Hiram.

It was characteristic of the two men that, different as they were in so many respects, they agreed at least in this, that they both thought Lydia's choice of Raven the fortunate thing, and the mighty inheritance merely came in by the way.

Hiram had just come back quite unexpectedly from a voyage of fantasy along the south and west coasts of Africa. Letters had come from him from time to time, dated from wonderful places with wonderful names. Grand Canary, Kroo Coasts, Bonny, Old Calabar, Cameroons, Eloby, Gaboon, Black Point, Half Jack, Grand Bassam; from such strangely named places his letters came—places suggestive of palms and spices, and mighty forests where the gaudy parrots screamed like mad, and huge man-monkeys swung gibbering from boughs, of the rank

luxuriance of jungle vegetation, of glowing fruit and gorgeous flowers, of macaws and alligators, and elephants, and all manner of barbaric marvels. They were all as familiar to Hiram as the Surrey roads were to Mrs. Borringer, and from his letters they seemed almost as familiar to Lydia as if she had looked upon them herself. As for Raven, though he was secretary of the Voyagers' Club, he was not, as he put it himself graphically, a whale on geography. He knew the places he had been to himself, but his travels had not taken him to the west and south-west coasts of Africa. So he had listened to the reading of Hiram's letters as they came with much profit.

Now Raven had met Hiram, and, looking at Hiram, Raven liked him. There was about him that curious air of self-reliance which only men get who have beaten about

the world by themselves for great gaps of time. He at once invited confidence and trust from men whose trust and whose confidence were worth having.

They all talked together for a little while, and then Raven rose to go. He had to be getting back to the club, to whose well-being and efficiency he was, creditably for him, as much devoted now, when he was the prospective heir to thousands, as he had been before, when he depended upon the salary the club paid him for his means of existence.

Mrs. Borringer handed Raven a small envelope neatly folded and neatly addressed to himself. 'That ought to do those headaches good,' she said, with a smile that was half-reproving. 'But the best plan is to avoid all occasion for such headaches.'

Raven laughed apologetically again, and

put the envelope into his pocket with many expressions of gratitude. To his surprise, Hiram Borringer, who had risen when he rose, now announced his intention of coming out with him.

'I want a blow in the open,' the hardy mariner expressed himself, 'and I shall be glad to have a stroll with you, seeing that you may be looked upon as one of the family.'

Naturally, Raven expressed himself as delighted at the opportunity of making Hiram's closer acquaintance. But he wondered mentally if the skimmer of the seas was about to administer any kind of moral lecture to him, or to advise him generally on his future conduct.

They said good-bye. Hiram promised to be back very soon, for, as Mrs. Borringer observed, the worst of Hiram was that if you once lost sight of him there was no knowing

when you might catch sight of him again. One might hear of him next from Pekin or Peru, or some such outlandish place.

When they got outside Hiram suggested that they should get into the vicinity of the river. Raven naturally agreeing, the pair went their way through Tite Street, and crossing the Embankment leaned upon the wall and looked down upon the glancing river. Hiram had talked pleasantly upon the way; the talk of a man who is a citizen of the world, a man to whom Tite Street, or Hermes Street, or Canal Street, New Orleans, is all one. But of the lecture that Raven vaguely dreaded, of the counsel that Raven vaguely resented, not a syllable.

It was very pretty on the Embankment and Raven was not in such a hurry to ge back to the Voyagers' Club that he could not enjoy the tranquil charm of the scene. Boat

with big red sails, sails as red as blood, floated slowly with the slight wind; huge barges, worked by one single strenuous figure playing with a mighty oar, like some realisation of Charon, drifted sluggishly with the stream; now and then a crowded steamboat scurried by, and now a shrieking steam-launch, and occasionally a pleasure skiff swept past, impelled by steady oars and ready arms. Raven had accepted a cigar from Hiram, a cigar which he found excellent and liked, and he was content enough to lean for a little upon the parapet and talk to Hiram and think of Lydia.

Suddenly Hiram spoke.

'Are those headaches of yours mighty troublesome?' he inquired, fixing his bright brown eyes upon Raven's face.

Raven was a man of the world, but he felt, with irritation, that he was colouring

under Hiram's gaze. 'Here is this confounded lecture at last,' he said to himself. Then, returning Hiram's gaze, he answered:

'Well, no, not very troublesome. I don't get them very often. I don't give them the chance, if that's what you mean.'

'No,' said Hiram slowly. 'No, that's not what I mean. What I mean is this: When you have a headache, do you always take some of that stuff which Susan gave you just now?'

Raven laughed a little consciously and shook his head.

'To tell the truth,' he said, 'I am sorry to say that I don't. I don't think I believe much in that sort of thing. It is only doctors in another form, and I think the more a fellow keeps himself clear of doctors the better for him.'

Hiram nodded. The sentiment was one

which met with his entire approval. Captain Raven went on, encouraged:

'The fact is, it pleases Mrs. Borringer to have an interest shown in her studies and herbs and all that, and one day when I had a headache she gave me something which she said would settle it all right. Well, I didn't take it—I never do take things; but when she asked me how it had worked I hadn't the courage to tell her that I had forgotten it, so I said, "Capitally." And to-day I asked her again for some of the stuff because I thought it would please her. Very wrong of me, no doubt,' Raven added penitently, 'but I like to please Mrs. Borringer.'

Hiram nodded again, approvingly. Then he spoke:

'That being so, I suppose you won't mind doing me a favour?'

'Surely not,' Raven answered, wondering

a little at the inappropriateness of the remark. 'I shall be more than delighted if I can in any way oblige you.'

'You can oblige me very much,' said Hiram, 'by giving me that powder, or whatever it was, which Susan gave to you just now.'

Raven stared at him in blank surprise. Was the excellent Hiram going off his head? But the excellent Hiram seemed as grave and sane as a man could be.

'Oh, of course, with pleasure,' Raven said, and he took the envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Hiram.

'Now look here,' said Hiram. 'I mean to keep this, if it's all the same to you.'

Raven was utterly mystified. He could not imagine why Hiram wanted to annex the powder after this fashion, but he muttered, 'Oh, certainly.'

'Good!' said Hiram. 'And, furthermore, if it's all the same to you, I should feel very much obliged if you didn't say anything about the matter to Susan—to Mrs. Borringer. If she asks you, you can say you are better —anything you like, but don't tell her about my asking for it. I may have good reasons, and I may not have good reasons, but I have reasons such as they are, and I should consider it as a personal favour if you were to humour me.'

'May I ask——?' Raven began, but Hiram promptly interrupted him.

'No,' he said, 'that is exactly what you may not do. You may not ask. You must take me and my request on trust as it were. Come, is it agreed?'

Raven, reflecting in his mind that Hiram Borringer was one of the most extraordinary human beings it had ever been his lot to meet,

but reflecting also that as he had not proposed seriously to experiment upon himself with Mrs. Borringer's remedies, nodded acquiescence. 'By all means if you wish it,' he said.

'Come,' said Hiram, 'that's good. We shall be friends, you and I. And now, if you don't mind, I will wish you good evening. They see you pretty often up at the shop, I expect?'

'Yes,' Raven answered. 'I go there pretty often. But I trust we shall meet often at the club.'

'The Club?'

Hiram seemed puzzled for a moment, but when Raven prompted with the words 'The Voyagers' Club' his countenance cleared again.

'I am not much of a clubman,' Hiram explained, 'but I will turn in there one night. You are there most nights, I expect?'

'Yes, almost always,' Raven answered.

Then Hiram extended his hand as if to signify that it was necessary that the interview should close. Raven took it, received a tremendous grip, and Hiram Borringer leaving him proceeded slowly back along Tite Street. Raven looked after him for a moment:

'Very remarkable man our seafaring friend,' he said to himself, 'very remarkable indeed. I wonder why he wanted that powder so particularly. Well, he seems a good sort, and he seems to approve of me on the whole, so that's all right.'

After this philosophical reflection Captain Raven looked about him, and espying a passing hansom hailed it and was soon whirling along towards the Voyagers' Club with his head full of love and Lydia.

Meanwhile Hiram Borringer walked slowly along Tite Street immersed in thought. His

thoughts took the form of wandering in a great variety of cities and scanning a great variety of faces that his memory was busy in calling from the past. In the course of his adventurous life he had been in far more cities, and known far more men than ever heroic Odysseus had done. It was his boast, too, and a true one, that he never forgot a face; but on this occasion, though he was certain about a face, he could not positively place it, could not call up the companion faces that would enable him to localise it. His mind was literally taking a tour of the round world at this moment. San Francisco, Port Said, Brisbane, Nagasaki, New Orleans, Fez, Gibraltar, Chandnagore, Dublin, Zanzibar, Leith, rose up in turn before him, only to be dismissed as they rose.

As he reached the top of the street an Italian blind in a window brought Italy into

his mind, and with it the very place that he wanted. 'Naples,' he said, and he repeated it aloud. 'Naples; that's the very place, and that's the very man!' and he slapped his hands together in satisfaction.

There was a hansom cab standing at the corner of Tite Street. Hiram hailed it, and getting in told the man to drive to Bond Street, to the address of a certain noted chemist. All the way along he kept thinking of Naples and of certain events there. When he got to his destination he got out and entered the shop. Taking the envelope which Raven had given him out of his pocket, he handed it to the man who came forward to attend to him.

'I want you to tell me what that is,' he said.

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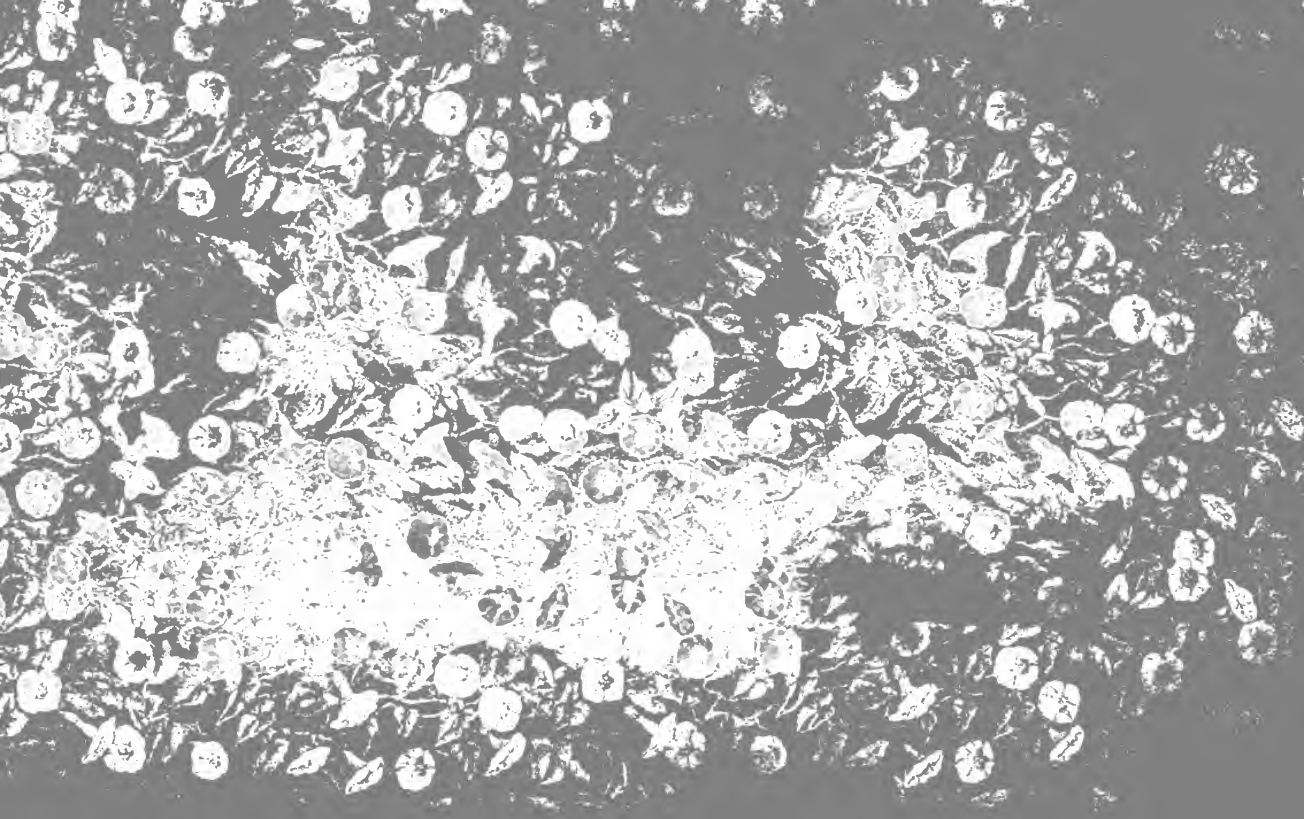

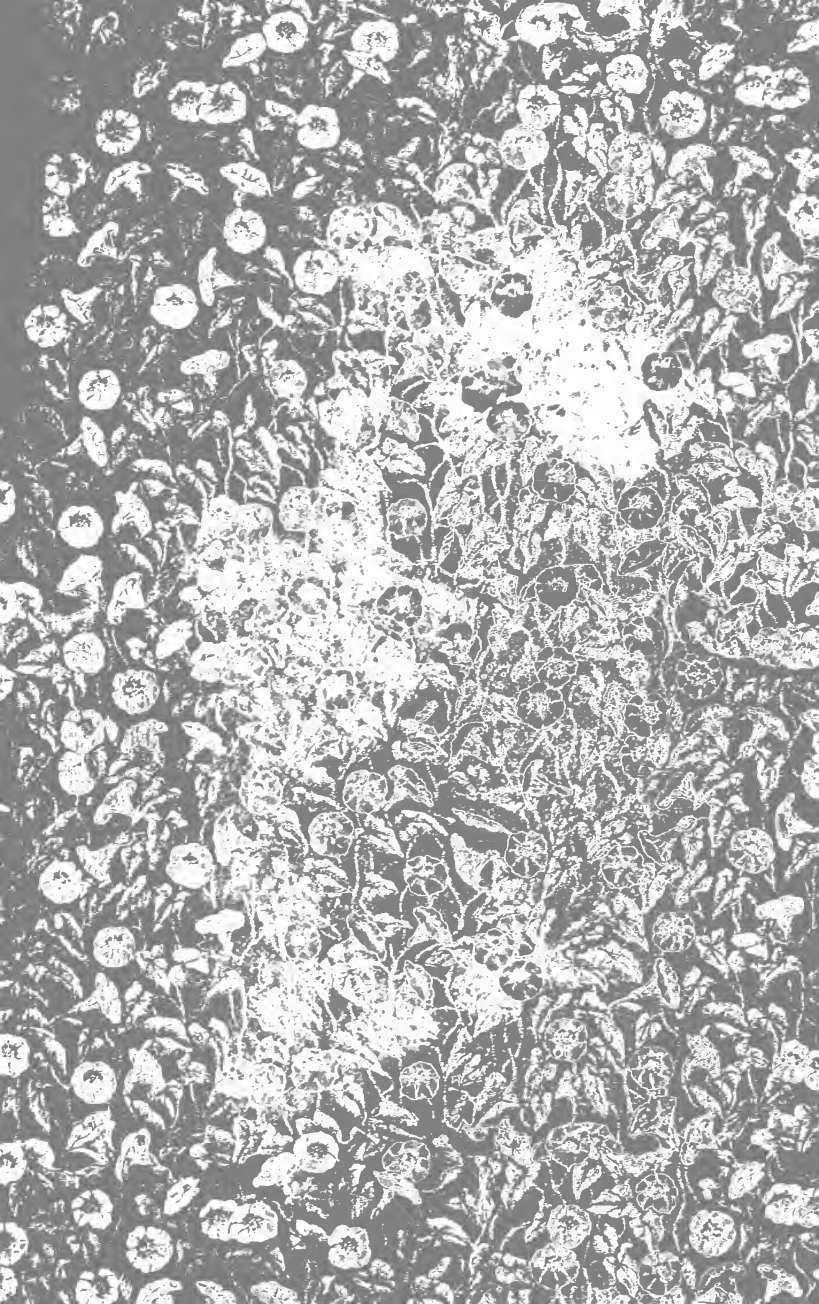

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